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# AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE COMPETITIVE INTERACTION OF AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASS

by

DENNIS ALBERT PERRIER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to describe the competitive interaction of a class of elementary school children from the point of view of the children themselves and of the teachers who were involved with these children. An attempt was made to uncover the competitive intentions of these participants and reveal possible relationships between these intentions.

Competition is a part of a child's experience. Through this experience he is able to seek meaning. The researcher endeavored to discover what competition meant to a class of grade four children and their teachers.

Initial observation of competitive interaction led the way later to in-depth informant interviewing to seek hidden motives. Categories of competition emerged giving opportunity for an interpretation of the teacher as competitor, the child as competitor and the influence of the teacher on children's competition.

The teacher became a competitor with children when intentions differed as to how time was to be used in the classroom. The teacher did not always have the same intention that the children had when assignments were given.

The children competed amongst themselves within the teacher's curriculum. The teacher either intended that the children be competitive or she played the role of facilitator in competitive situations which the children initiated. The children by their own choice intended to be first, to be involved or not to be competitive at all.

The children also interacted competitively outside of the teacher's curriculum. This interaction was observed out on the playground. The children were concerned with satisfying their own intentions away from teacher influence. These intentions were a consideration of others and a desire to be part of the action.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | The Reality of Competition | 1 |
| | The Issue of Competition | 1 |
| | An Investigation of Competition in an Educational Setting | 2 |
| | The Problem and its Scope | 5 |
| | The Use of Ethnographic Method | 7 |
| | Objectivity | 9 |
| II | RESEARCH DESIGN | 11 |
| | Entry into the Setting | 12 |
| | Some Reflections on Entry | 15 |
| | Establishing a Role as Researcher | 16 |
| | A. Researcher Role and Children | 17 |
| | B. Researcher Role and Staff | 20 |
| | Data Collection Devices | 22 |
| | Time Spent in the Field | 25 |
| | Ongoing Analysis of Data | 25 |
| | The Setting | 26 |
| III | THE TEACHER AS A COMPETITOR WITH CHILDREN | 27 |
| | The Teachers' Perspective | 28 |
| | A. Teachers Impose Their Will | 28 |
| | B. Reasons Teachers Impose Their Will | 31 |
| | C. Teachers Soften Their Demands | 32 |
| | The Children's Perspective | 33 |
| | A. Children Impose Their Will | 33 |
| | B. Reasons Children Impose Their Will | 36 |

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| III | C. Children Comply With the Teachers' Demands . . . . . | 38 |
| | Summary . . . . . | 41 |
| IV | CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION WITHIN THE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM . . . . . | 44 |
| | The Teacher Planned Competition Within Her Curriculum and Compared Pupil Performance . . . . | 45 |
| | A. Reasons for Teacher Planned Competitive Interaction and Compared Performance . . . . . | 50 |
| | B. Teacher Concern About the Effect of Competition on Children . . . . . | 51 |
| | C. Children's Intentions . . . . . | 52 |
| | The Teacher Planned Competition Without an Overt Effort to Compare Performance . . . . . | 53 |
| | The Teacher "Set the Scene" for Competitive Interaction in Which Children Initiated Competition . . . . . | 54 |
| | A. Academic Accomplishments . . . . . | 55 |
| | B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum . . . . . | 57 |
| | The Teacher Facilitated the Children's Comparison of Performance . . . . . | 59 |
| | Indirect Factors that Facilitated the Comparison of Performance . . . . . | 61 |
| | A. Academic Accomplishments . . . . . | 61 |
| | B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum . . . . . | 63 |
| | Children's Competitive Intentions Varied . . . . . | 64 |
| | Teachers' Awareness of Children's Competitive Interaction . . . . . | 66 |
| | A. Academic Accomplishments . . . . . | 66 |
| | B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum . . . . . | 66 |

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| IV | Summary | 67 |
| V | CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION OUTSIDE OF THE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM | 70 |
| | Game of Raiders | 70 |
| | Game of Push | 71 |
| | Game of Push-Off-the-Hill | 72 |
| | Game of Push-Off-the-Mountain | 74 |
| | Game of Tag | 74 |
| | Game of Hockey | 75 |
| | Game of Mr. Wolf | 78 |
| | Game of Skipping | 79 |
| | Summary | 81 |
| VI | FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS | 83 |
| | The Teacher as a Competitor With Children | 84 |
| | Findings | 84 |
| | Conclusion | 85 |
| | Implications | 85 |
| | Children's Peer Group Competition Within the Teachers' Curriculum | 85 |
| | Findings | 86 |
| | Conclusion | 87 |
| | Implications | 88 |
| | Children's Peer Group Competition Outside of the Teachers' Curriculum | 88 |
| | Findings | 89 |
| | Conclusion | 90 |
| | Implications | 90 |
| | The Making of Choices | 90 |
| | A Consideration for Future Research | 91 |

PAGE

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 93

APPENDICES . . . . . 96

APPENDIX A. Letter Requesting Parental Permission to Observe . . . . . 97

APPENDIX B. Letter Requesting Parental Permission to Interview . . . . . 98

APPENDIX C. Diagram of the School Lay-out . . . . . 99

APPENDIX D. Class Timetable . . . . . 100

APPENDIX E. School Opening Letter . . . . . 101

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## The Reality of Competition

Piaget (1973) concludes that competition is a part of a child's developmental picture. This picture of a child's growth ordinarily includes competitive experience. David Bean (1981) refers to the latter half of the elementary school years when he states that, "Competition in some shape or form will exist at this stage whether we like it or not" (p. 23). Constance Kamii (1980) gives support to the existence of competition.

> Even if the definition included intra-individual struggle, this would not prevent children from developing their ability to compete. . . . Development is so natural and powerful that when it occurs, it is impossible to suppress it (p. 197).

The actuality of competition appears not only to be apparent in the individual but it is claimed to be present when children interact with each other. Richard Alderman (1974) says, "As soon as a child becomes interested in the fact that other people exist and are involved with what he is doing, his competitive behavior increases" (p. 98). Competitive interaction during a child's development is more evident when he begins to have a greater interest in others.

Because competition appears to play such a role in the life of a child, there is a curiosity about the outcome of competitive interaction.

## The Issue of Competition

As a teacher, this researcher has concerns about the effect of competitive situations on the emotional growth of children. These concerns stem from the researcher's involvement as a child competitor both outside and inside the school setting and as one who has since witnessed or has

structured competitive interaction among children.

When people, especially children, compete, there is always a certain amount of interest as to what accrues. Jack Berryman (1978) states that, "A steady stream of proposals, guidelines, speeches, manuals, and periodical articles containing warnings against too much competition for elementary school children flowed from the ranks of professional educators" (p. 7). This interest in children's competition is due to a caring for "what happens" when children compete. To find out the reality of "what happens" certain questions need to be answered.

a) What feelings develop during competitive interaction?

b) Are these feelings positive and/or negative?

c) What kind of competition is expressed as being positive and what kind is expressed as being negative?

d) What do those involved do to structure competitive situations?

e) How do adults function in the competition of children and how do children interact competitively?

In essence one must ask, "What does competition mean to those in the situation?"

An Investigation of Competition in an Educational Setting

A review of literature suggests that the education of children involves competitive interaction. Johnson and Johnson (1978) conducted interviews with elementary school children and found that, "The results of these studies clearly indicate that the vast majority of students perceive school as being competitive" (p. 4). Alderman (1974) supports this view when he states that, "Competitiveness is largely nurtured and directed by education" (p. 99). Margaret Mead (1937) confirms that competition is present in the educational system.

> That the most determinative factor is the educational system and that by examining this with care we might find forms of education which seemed necessary to the formation . . . of a competitive character structure (p. 19).

The competitive interaction in the educational setting has been discussed by others in a less neutral fashion. Constance Kamii (1980), who is supported by Berryman's (1978) earlier statement, is of the opinion that teachers are concerned about competition. "The word competition is loaded with negative connotations and teachers are rightfully concerned about the kind of competition that breeds rivalry and feelings of failure and rejection" (p. 189). Johnson and Johnson (1974) warn that:

> For the teacher who is truly interested in intellectual functioning, one of the saddest probable consequences of the continual use of competitive goal structure is that the intrinsic motivation for learning and thinking will become subverted (p. 226).

As illustrated by Kamii (1980) and Johnson and Johnson (1978), the schooling process may well consist of detrimental competitive aspects. However, Kamii (1980) refers to "the kind of competition" and Johnson and Johnson to "the continual use of competitive goal structures". From the children and teachers' viewpoint, what kind of competition is positive? Is some use of competition as viewed by those within the classroom beneficial?

An attempt must be made to see what competition means to the children and teachers in a school classroom. The ethnographic method is applied to meet this end. Wolcott (1979) speaks of ethnography when he explains that:

> One of the most satisfying aspects of this traditional approach is that one is free to discover what the problem is rather than obliged to pursue inquiry into a predetermined problem that may in fact exist only in the mind of the investigator (p. 113).

What is competition to the children and teachers involved? The researcher cannot truthfully describe the reality of competitive life within the classroom by assumption. The researcher must come to know the problems as seen by the people there. Wolcott (1975) expounds that, "Ethnographic accounts focus on the way particular groups of people confront the problems facing them" (p. 123).

What is competition in our classrooms and what are the inherent problems of classroom competition? What are the questions to be answered? Is competition as Margaret Mead (1937) describes it; "The act of seeking or endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time" (p. 15)? Is this the competition that classroom participants would describe as reality? If so, what is the quality of this competition as interpreted by those in the situation?

The literature suggests that the roles that children and teachers play in competitive interaction within the school environment are significant. Johnson and Johnson (1978) explain that, "The way in which teachers structure learning goals determines how students interact with each other and with the teacher" (p. 4). Is there a relationship between the goals structured by the teacher (and possibly by children) and the character of competition within the school? If so, what is the connection between the intentions of the teacher and the intentions of the child during competitive interaction?

To explore this relationship, one must gain an understanding of what competition is to the participants inside a classroom. This is not done simply through an observation of overt action as intention. It is also accomplished by discovering the hidden intention. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) clarify by describing the goal of ethnography.

> Ethnography is not merely an objective description of people and their behavior from the observer's viewpoint. It is a systematic attempt to discover the knowledge a group of people have learned and are using to organize their behavior (p. 9).

The knowledge that teachers and children use to organize their behavior in competitive situations is of concern. The competitive intentions of the participants within a classroom are not easily discovered without probing into the competitive experience of teachers and children from their point of view.

## The Problem and its Scope

The purpose of this study is to uncover the competitive intentions within an elementary school class. Wolcott (1973) gives direction when he emphasizes the importance of recording the activity and interactions of the participants. Involved in this recording were concerns about: who initiated the activity; where; when; who was talking; how many people were involved. This investigation of competitive intent attempted to:

a) discover the actions and events that were viewed as competitive.

b) discover when competition occurred.

c) describe the settings in which competition occurred.

d) describe how the teacher and the child interacted competitively, if at all.

e) describe the teacher's and the child's perceptions of any possible relationship between the teacher's intentions and competitive interaction among children.

f) describe the child's intentions when interacting with other children in competitive situations.

An analysis and interpretation of these descriptions was to reveal what competition was to the children and teachers in an elementary school class.

Possible competitive interaction was to be noted during initial observations. However, in discovering specific points of view, questions which probed into the meaning that competition had for the participants were to be asked.

The competitive intent of the interaction between the teacher and students or among the students themselves was the focus. Self-competition, endeavoring to better one's own performance, was not dealt with. Competition was treated as a social happening; one of interaction between people.

The conclusions of the teacher and children on competitive interaction in a grade four class was to be considered in any physical setting within the perimeter of the school grounds. Time spent within the school building in classrooms and in the gymnasium, and occasions out on the playground during recesses and noonhours was the focus.

Ethnographic fieldwork was chosen as a mode of inquiry to recognize the intent of the competitors. Foster (1977) describes the processes this way:

a) The researcher must gain entry into the scene.

b) Initial rapport must be established.

c) The researcher must find ways of gathering information.

d) There must be a variety of physical settings in which to learn the participants' perspective.

More than anything else, the exploration of the point of view of the children and teachers was the primary objective. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) explain: "This is a radical change in the way many scientists see their work. Instead of asking, 'What do I see these people doing?', we must ask, 'What do these people see themselves doing?'"

(p. 9). What did the participants see as their competitive intentions?

The Use of Ethnographic Method

The ethnographic method provides a means to explore intentions and gain an understanding of competitive interaction. Spradley (1980) tells us that, "Ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (p. 3). To fully understand what it is like to interact in competitive situations within an elementary school class, one must get the child's and the teacher's point of view; the point of view of the natives; the people who exist and act in the classroom environment.

Sherif (1978) points the way to an ethnographic investigation of competition. "Our task is to examine . . . competitive processes by inquiring into the social context in which children come together" (p. 82). The relationships within the school make up the social context in which competitive interaction takes place. David Johnson (1981) explains that, "The primary educational relationships are between teachers and students and among students themselves" (p. 5). To study the role that competitive interaction plays in the relationships of children and between teachers and children, the researcher explores the meaning that competition has for them in their day-to-day existence in an elementary school. An effort must be made to suspend any presuppositions and to shift concern to the investigation of perspective. What do the participants see as their intentions when competing?

Barker (1968) writes of forces generated by what is expected and allowed in settings. The relationships within the school setting are thus influenced. An examination of the intentions, as the child and the teacher see them in competitive relationships, and any correlation

with the traits of the setting must be considered. These traits include elements of the physical environment and the unspoken rules that govern the interaction of the children and teachers.

Eisner (1978) lends support for ethnographical research in the social context of a school.

> What is needed is attention to the processes of classroom life and the use of forms of disclosure that can capture and convey what goes on in those settings we call classrooms and schools (p. 21).

Ethnographic procedure allows the researcher to pay attention to and focus the collection of data upon that which reflects the day-to-day interaction of the participants in the school setting. The researcher is able to see the process of intention in competitive situations as the participants see it.

Johnson and Ahlgren (1976) give direction to the ethnographic investigation of competition within the school.

> Relationships among variables do not hold in more complex naturalistic settings when the independent variables are interacting with a wide variety of diffuse and diverse influences. Before the results of the experimental research on . . . competition are applied in schools, it is important to validate them in research on naturalistic uncontrolled school settings (p. 92).

When children and teachers are entangled in competitive interaction within the school, there is no simple way to describe the nature of this involvement. Competitive situations seem to be part of the human experience in schools and an attempt to explore these encounters should be done in the most natural setting. A study of this setting should reveal the desires, the motives and the resolutions of the participants; the intentions as the competitive actors see them and the factors that facilitate these intentions.

Objectivity

The ethnographer must attempt to be objective.

> No observer can ever fully overcome his own perceptual orientation. The word 'objective' then, is used as a desired goal, rather than as a reality. It is possible to record what one sees objectively, but it is a mistake to assume that it is seen objectively (Gordon, 1966:65).

To describe competitive interaction as it actually exists without prejudgement, the researcher was aware of his own biases and attempted to prevent them from obscuring an accurate account of events.

The ethnographic researcher used disciplined subjectivity as a way to prevent the pollution of data with subjective bias.

> The discipline of the research tradition calls for him to constantly monitor and test his reactions. In addition to systematically taking the perspectives of the subjects, who rarely share a monolithic point of view, he also views actions from the perspective of the outsider. By systematically seeking to understand actions from the different perspectives of various groups of participants, the researcher avoids getting caught in any one outlook (Wilson, 1977:259).

Myer Horowitz (1972) spoke of disciplined subjectivity when he warned that the ethnographic researcher must be aware of the degree of confidence that his data will bring. He must check his perceptions with informants. This perceptual check was carried out by the researcher through interviewing all of the teachers and a sampling of children. Three teachers and four children representing a variance of competitive personality were questioned. Children who seemed to be involved in competitive activity in an overt manner as well as ones who did not appear quite so competitive were respondents. Both teachers and children were asked to confirm whether or not they were indeed competing and if so, there was an attempt to reveal their intentions.

The researcher also employed a variety of techniques for gathering data. These included asking off-the-cuff questions, observations, taped interviews,

and participation in competitive interaction. This data was interpreted in terms of the competitive setting.

There was an attempt to view competitive interaction from the perspective of the child and the teacher and to view this interaction from an inside and an outside research position. The researcher stood back and watched but also participated and interviewed.

Wolcott (1975) suggests the keeping of a journal to:

a) make the researcher's feeling and attitudes clear concerning competition involving teachers and children,

b) put things down as they are seen and felt, and

c) tell how the researcher has been changed by the fieldwork experience.

The researcher's concerns and changes in viewpoint regarding competition can best be described through journal entries. Before beginning to collect data, the researcher had certain opinions.

> Competitive situations are not necessarily harmful if the standards set are determined by the children themselves. If outside people (i.e., adults) impose standards for competing, these situations can become quite harmful.
> (Journal Entry [J.E.]: January 7, 1982)

As the study proceeded, views changed.

> In initiating competition (although performance may be compared covertly) teachers (adults) may try to cushion the effects of competition in various ways.
> (J.E.: February 17, 1982)

"Cushioning" refers to an attempt to make the effects of competition less damaging. The viewpoint continued to change.

> Although teachers do set standards for competitive situations, they do not always set these standards intentionally; that is they initiate or set the scene for competitive interactions almost unknowingly. A lot of what is competitive in a classroom is carried out because of circumstances that are structured by the teachers.
> (J.E.: February 25, 1982)

## CHAPTER II

## RESEARCH DESIGN

"Ethnography has been described as an anthropologist's 'picture' of the way of life of some interacting human groups" (Wolcott, 1975:112). The competitive intentions of a heterogeneous class of grade four boys and girls and those of the teachers and an administrator who were responsible for supervision and education of these children were considered. The competitive interaction of this group of children and their teachers was the picture under consideration.

The child's point of view regarding competitive situations in the school was significant. Terry Orlick emphasizes the importance of obtaining the child's perspective.

> You must try to learn from the children as we have learned by listening to what they say and by closely observing how they respond to what you do or what other people do. Our greatest inspirations have come from children. They have been our greatest teachers . . . . Children are perceptive and have a tremendous amount to offer if they are given opportunity to express their views (1977:57-58).

Children, as participants in and observers of competitive interaction were quite capable of expressing their views. These views were recorded in the form of fieldnotes, which were made up of observed actions and conversation, and also in the form of tape recorded interviews.

Along with the child's perspective, the teacher's intentions concerning her curriculum and the demeanour of children were found to be important. Wolcott (1975) reassures that, "My experience has been that teachers are usually quite willing to respond to a personal invitation for an interview" (p. 122). The teachers' relationship with the child was investigated in the light of their point of view of competitive

interaction. This point of view was discovered not only through observation by the researcher, but also through tape recorded interviews.

During interaction, ethnographical fieldwork was employed to understand the perspectives of the children and teachers. Wilson describes why this technique is a valuable tool in educational research.

> Human behavior is complexly influenced by the context in which it occurs. Any research plan which takes the actors out of the naturalistic setting may negate those forces and hence obscure its own understanding (1977:253).

In a competitive situation, the researcher attempted to take into account all of the influences that existed. Wilson says, "As organizations, schools exert many powerful forces on participant behavior" (1977:247).

Secondly, Wilson emphasizes that, "Human behavior often has more meaning than its observable facts" (1977:253). In competitive situations, the researcher must probe, be aware of and consider hidden motives and perspectives that may be lost because of a failure to explore more deeply.

In order to uncover the hidden motives of any competitive encounter, the researcher must begin by taking the initial step of ethnographic fieldwork; gaining entry.

## Entry into the Setting

January 20th 1982

The researcher approached a school principal, Mr. White, with a request to carry out a study. The principal was informed that the researcher was a graduate student from the University of Alberta who was interested in doing an unobtrusive study in a grade four or five classroom. The researcher would maintain a low profile and attempt not to disrupt normal activity. The researcher would be concerned with how children interact. This interaction would be noted through observation,

by copying verbatim conversations and possibly by interviewing one or two students later on. The principal wanted more detail as to what the researcher was looking for exactly. He was informed that exploring the relationship between the intentions of the children and teachers in competitive interaction was the focus. The focus was not to be made generally known. The principal was told that aliases would be used for teachers, students and the school when the research was formally written up. He was also informed of a tentative timeline for research.

The principal indicated his desire to check with his grade four and five teachers before he could make a commitment. The principal immediately commented, that as long as clearance was received through the school board he could see "no problem".

January 22nd 1982

This researcher waited for Mr. White's return call but when no call came, the school was contacted. The principal said his grade four teacher, Mrs. Smith, expressed interest and was going to call for more information. The researcher decided to make contact with her on the same day. Upon entering the school and talking to Mr. White, it was suggested that the researcher knock on Mrs. Smith's door. As it was nearing the end of the school day, the researcher waited in the hall until classes were dismissed. While he was waiting, Mrs. Smith came out into the hall.

Researcher: My name is Dennis Perrier.

Mrs. Smith: You're the person I was supposed to phone?

Researcher: Yes.

Mrs. Smith: I will be available at 3:30 if you want to speak to me then?

Researcher: Okay.

At 3:30:

Mrs. Smith: Okay, I'm ready.

(Fieldnote Entry [F.N.E.] January 22, 1982)

Mrs. Smith was interested in when and for how long the study would take place, what type of situations were being studied and whether or not the researcher would follow her or her class. She was informed of the tentative timeline for the study and that in the observation of the class there would be an attempt by the researcher not to interfere with normal classroom activity. She was also told that it was important for the children to know the researcher was a student from the university. Since any competitive interaction between herself and the children and between the children themselves would be noted, the children should not be made aware that the interest of the researcher was focused upon the competitive aspect. She, on several occasions, said, "fine, fine" to the information given her. She was asked if she was pressured into calling the researcher. She replied that she was not and that the principal asked only for a yes or no answer. Mrs. Smith added that Mr. Green and Mr. White would have to be contacted in order to obtain their permission to observe her class while they were teaching the science, math and physical education parts of the curriculum.

Mr. Green was approached in the hall and gave his permission readily. He said he understood that he should not tell the children that competition was the area of interest of the researcher.

> Mrs. Smith accepted my research needs and did not show hesitation in granting them. She was concerned about the times I would be coming and why I was doing the research. Mr. Green was as cordial as Mr. White and welcomed my involvement. I believe I have made an excellent beginning at Suburban Elementary. My relationship with the school must remain this way. I want to blend into the background and create a minimum amount of disruption. The school setting must remain as normal as possible when I'm present.
>
> (J.E.: January 25, 1982)

February 1st 1982

The researcher called Mrs. Smith. She gave her permission to begin the study on Wednesday, February 3rd. She said she would let Mr. Green know the researcher was coming. Mr. White was also informed of this plan and answered, "okay, great" to a request to see him before the researcher entered Mrs. Smith's class on that day. As it turned out, the study did not formally begin until February 8th because of the researcher's commitments at the University of Alberta.

> Mr. White and Mrs. Smith have both given me permission to begin my research on Wednesday, February 3rd 1982. They have been, and still are, very positive.
>
> (J.E.: February 1, 1982)

February 8th 1982

Before entering Mrs. Smith's class, the researcher met with Mr. White. It was suggested by Mr. White that a letter be drafted to the parents of the children in Mrs. Smith's room explaining the presence of the researcher and requesting parental co-operation. The letter (Appendix A) identified the researcher as a university student as well as described the general nature of his inquiry without being too specific. Because Suburban Elementary has been frequently involved as a research site and was in an area where a number of professional university staff resided, it was thought that the role of researcher would be familiar and non-threatening. The letter was delivered by each child as was the custom at the school. It was received without feedback as no objection was given.

Some Reflections on Entry

Wilson summarizes Geer (1964) as to what the researcher attempts to do during entry. "He monitors the way his entry into the community is initiated both officially and unofficially because he knows this will

influence how people see him" (1977:25). Entry into Suburban Elementary School was accomplished without setback. The researcher's experience in receiving permission from the school board administration and being allowed to observe in Mrs. Smith's room was very positive.

The teachers and the principal at the school were given information that did not deviate from the intention of the researcher. Their concerns and questions were answered clearly and honestly without going into detail about the focus of the research.

> One good rule to follow . . . at the start of the research . . . is to tell the truth. . . . Telling the truth does not mean going into elaborate detail as to your specific substantive or theoretical interests or the techniques you are employing (Bogdan, 1975:19).

Establishing a Role as Researcher

> The ethnographer is sensitive to the way he enters a setting and carefully establishes a role that facilitates the collection of information. . . . He tries not to be identified with any particular group in the setting (Wilson, 1977:254).

An attempt was made not to be identified with the child group or the teacher group. If identification with any group occurred, there would be less chance of preserving neutrality which was vital in obtaining in-depth perspectives. The researcher wanted to be seen as a university student doing research; a person who was interested in interaction not in playing the role of teacher or child.

Wilson refers to the researcher when he says, "Moreover, throughout the study he monitors the views participants have of him" (1977:254). Wilson then tells why these views are important:

> The group identity of the observer is important not only because the participants might consciously withhold information from someone with the wrong identifications . . . but also because the participants might consciously color what they said and did (1977:254).

If the researcher was seen as a student or a teacher, the participants of competitive events may see one or the other identity as threatening therefore possibly distorting interaction that would normally take place.

Classroom Introduction: February 8th 1982

A substitute teacher was instructing the children on this first day of contact with the children. She was asked not to introduce the researcher as "Mr." or inform the students that an understanding of competition in the classroom was the intent of the study. She asked the researcher to introduce himself. The researcher's name was printed on the board as "DENNIS PERRIER".

> Researcher: I am a student from the university. I'm trying to see what it is like to be a student in grade four. Just try to forget I'm here. I will not try to bother you.
>
> Substitute: He has forgotten what it's like to be in grade four.
>
> (F.N.E.: February 8, 1982)

It was very important that the children not see the researcher as a teacher but as a university student collecting information for a research project.

A. Researcher Role and Children

> Perhaps the most difficult role to establish in a school is that which is perceived by the students. This sub-group in particular should be aware that the researcher is as much a non-teacher as a non-pupil (Hawke, 1980:10).

If the researcher was seen as a teacher, the children may not have revealed their true intentions as readily. The interviews and discussions may not have been taken seriously if the children saw the researcher as child-like.

The researcher, while in Mrs. Smith's and Mr. Green's classrooms, occupied a desk at the back or the side of the room. Angie and Nancy

were frequent visitors to the researcher's desk during the first few days. They would peer in the fieldwork notebook and make comments like, "I can't read your writing."

> Many students wanted to know what I was writing about. I kept telling them that I wrote down what they said and did in school. This seemed to satisfy the more curious of them.
> (J.E.: February 8, 1982)

Nancy: Why do you look at everything?

Researcher: I'm just interested in what you do in class.
(F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

The researcher was referred to by his first name.

> The grade four boys were playing ice hockey during noon hour. The researcher approached them carrying a hockey stick.

Robert: Dennis is coming. He's going to play. Hurry up.

Robert to the Researcher: Dennis and me will stand.

The rest objected.

Other kids playing: Dennis and Dino.
(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

The researcher was asked on other occasions to take part in student activities.

> The children were being seated for science class. Laura spoke to the researcher.

Laura: Are you going to do the experiment with us?

Angie, Beverly and Laura: Could you sit with us at the table?
(F.N.E.: April 15, 1982)

The children attempted to label the researcher.

> On the way into the classroom from recess Beverly and Angie stopped and spoke to the researcher.

Angie: You're the biggest kid in our class.

Beverly: You're just like a kid. You go out for recess. You play in gym. You sit in a desk.
(F.N.E.: February 23, 1982)

The researcher was not always likened to a "kid" and frequently was the recipient of much advice related to role expectations.

> While getting lunch out of his knapsack the researcher was approached by Beverly.
>
> Beverly: Where do you eat your lunch?
>
> Researcher: In the staff room.
>
> Beverly: If you're a kid, you should eat in the lunchroom.
>
> Researcher: Good point.
>
> (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)
>
> After recess at the coatrack, Nancy spoke to the researcher.
>
> Nancy: Were you playing hockey?
>
> Researcher: Yes.
>
> Nancy: You really are supposed to stay and watch - not play.
>
> (F.N.E.: March 18, 1982)

Trust toward the researcher was shown as well as recognition that he was an adult.

> Robert was supposed to be working during a math class when he spoke to the researcher.
>
> Robert: Dennis, at recess want to get the shovel?
>
> Researcher: (nodded)
>
> Steven wanted the shovel to clean the ice for hockey. Mr. Jones, the janitor, wouldn't give it to a "kid".
>
> (F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

The verbatim conversation given above points to the conclusion that children viewed the researcher as an adult but not as a teacher or child. It was difficult, to avoid the role of authoritarian adult. While observing or playing with children at recess the researcher was a witness to the breaking of school rules, such as throwing snow chunks. At times like these the researcher tended to ignore the situation.

B. Researcher Role and Staff

It was critical also that the school staff should see the researcher's role as one that did not ignore their position. It was important that the teachers not view the researcher as a child; nor as being overly sympathetic to the causes of children. The teachers may have seen this role as one they could not fully trust.

The role of researcher was established with the staff of the school through manner of dress, not attempting to have the same social interaction as a teacher or a child ordinarily would have, and not getting directly involved in teacher/child conflict. Hawke (1980) warns:

> Once in the field, the researcher must strive to establish non-threatening relationships with those around him and attempt to assume a neutral position with no special alliances to any one faction in the field (p. 9).

Mrs. Smith: Upon entry into Mrs. Smith's classroom, every attempt was made to be as inconspicuous as possible. A seat at the back of the room was occupied by the researcher who endeavored to stay there and take notes. If children spoke to the researcher, especially if the teacher required their attention, an attempt was made not to distract the students from their assignments and their focus upon the teacher and the blackboard.

On several occasions the researcher and Mrs. Smith discussed the school, the students in her class and the parents. These conversations were a free exchange of thoughts and were not necessarily about the research topic but were considered professional and helpful in building a trust relationship.

Mr. White: Mr. White was very positive regarding the researcher's presence in the school, allowing every request that was made for his time and his school. He was very non-judgemental of the research process and

encouraged staff involvement.

He made a request of the researcher to observe a child in Mrs. Smith's room in an attempt to aid the counselor in her appraisal. The request was accepted as it did not interfere with the researcher's task and provided an opportunity to be of service. Mr. White seemed appreciative of the researcher's co-operation.

Mr. Green: He was also very co-operative in that any request made for his time was received positively. He invited the researcher to "feel free" to come into his class. He was willing to discuss the research at any time and also readily gave up time for interviewing.

On one occasion Mr. Green asked the researcher if he could set up some competitive situations. He was told no and that everything must be as natural as possible. He should just carry on as he usually did. It was very necessary to make this clear to Mr. Green. Any tampering with the setting could well have distorted the findings.

Mrs. Walker (the secretary): The school secretary gave an indication of one role which had been assigned to the researcher by the staff.

As I was leaving the school around 4:00 P.M.:

Mrs. Walker
to the
Researcher: Are you studying to be a teacher?
(F.N.E.: March 12, 1982)

The school staff certainly did not designate the researcher as a child. Several requests were made of the author to give professional assistance. These included observation of a problem-student and supervision of the grade four class on a fieldtrip. The staff, on the other hand, did not see the researcher as an equal. The author was referred to as a student teacher and was not accepted on the same social basis as other teachers.

Data Collection Devices

> This kind of anthropological inquiry seeks to discover the meaning structures of the participants in whatever forms they are expressed. Hence, the research is multimodal (Wilson, 1977:255).

The researcher collected documents, made hand-written fieldnote descriptions of competitive situations, recorded verbatim conversation within the context of competitive interaction, tape recorded these interactions, carried out tape recorded informant interviews, asked informal questions, participated in competitive events and expressed his reactions and emerging hypothesis in a journal. All of these data collection devices were needed. Wolcott (1973) explains that, "The field-worker rests his claims for validity on his use of a number of information gathering devices" (p. 121).

The focus here was competitive interaction within a single class of children. Their demeanor was observed by the researcher through making a point of being where they interacted. Initial observation gave rise to a curiosity about hidden intentions. Children who were knowledgeable and friendly were the respondents to questions that arose because of this curiosity. "Ethnographic researchers methodically plan the forms of data they will collect, the settings in which they will gather the data, the participants with whom they will interact and the questions they will ask" (Wilson, 1977:257).

Documentation: The researcher also retained copies of two letters sent to parents. The first, as has already been stated, asked consent for the researcher's observation of the children (Appendix A). The second letter requested permission for the interviewing of children (Appendix B).

This also involved the gathering of copies of school documents. These documents included a school floor plan (Appendix C), a class time-

table (Appendix D) and a school opening letter (Appendix E). These documents allowed the researcher to adjust to school and classroom routine in order to anticipate where and when the children gathered for interaction and also gave an indication of community-school interaction.

Observation in the setting: Initial data took the form of observation. Williamson et al. (1977) state that, "The substance of systematic, objective and analytical . . . observation lies in the keeping of accurate and detailed fieldnotes" (p. 207). Fieldnotes were recorded in each of the three classrooms the children visited regularly during the school day. Notes were also recorded in other physical settings where the children gathered. These included the gymnasium and on the playground.

The words and actions of teachers and children were of concern within the school while the children received attention outside of the building proper, during recesses and at noon hours.

Informal questioning and participation: During the research period the researcher found it necessary not only to ask informal questions of people involved in competitive interaction, but also to participate in competitive activity with the children. This participation took the form of practicing skills and playing games in physical education, competing in recess activities and getting involved in a students' versus teachers' floor hockey contest. The researcher investigated any interaction where two or more participants were involved in the same activity at the same time.

The researcher took the role of a participant to gain a "closeness" with the children. Sue Ann Straits tells that, "The . . . participant observation provided opportunity for students to become comfortable with my presence" (p. 11). If the researcher was perceived as a friendly, non-threatening person, it was thought that the children may have acted

in a more genuine manner. The researcher also participated to gain an insight of competitive activity at close range.

Although participation put the researcher into the child role, steps were taken not to be perceived as a child. These included stepping out of the activity to observe, asking questions as to intention while the children competed and using his influence as an adult to obtain equipment for their activity.

Tape recording of ongoing activity: Because it was not always possible to record verbatim what children and teachers said, in competitive situations within the classroom or gymnasium, a tape recorder was used to obtain evidence of continuous competitive activity.

This form of data collection was particularly useful during physical education class, when tests were returned and report cards distributed in the classroom.

The tape recorder was a portable stereo model which contained two microphones for increased reception. There was no noticeable change in interaction because of its presence.

Informant interviewing: Several formally structured interviews with children were accomplished. The children made the choice to have these interviews during recess. These pre-planned, tape recorded sessions were carried out upon a request made by the researcher. Each request, without exception, was accepted positively. The three teachers were also interviewed to gain an understanding of their influence on competitive activity within the classroom.

These interviews allowed the researcher to uncover hidden intentions and to provide a perceptual check of the non-participatory and participatory observation data collected beforehand.

## Time Spent in the Field

Competitive interactions were observed, participated in and recorded in the form of fieldnotes and tape recordings beginning February 8th, 1982 and continuing to April 22nd, 1982. The researcher was in the setting on eighteen occasions. These visits included tape recordings of ongoing classroom activities on eight occasions. Informant interviews were carried out. These included sixteen interview sessions when four children in Mrs. Smith's class were questioned for approximately fifteen minutes per session. The three teachers who instructed the grade four class were interviewed on four occasions of approximately thirty minutes per occasion.

## Ongoing Analysis of Data

After each day of data collection a general description of each competitive event was summarized and significant taped conversations noted. Tentative categories of competitive interaction were initially outlined then modified and enlarged as the research process continued. Observation and participation allowed the establishment of initial categories which were refined and probed in-depth through informant interviewing.

A journal was also kept, not only to record subjective reactions, but to make interpretations of emerging data.

> The anthropologist seeks to understand the meanings of the participants and hence seeks to be careful not to have his interpretations prematurely overstructured by theory or previous research. Furthermore, he is perhaps more ready*than other kinds of researchers to accept the possible uniqueness of the various settings, group, organizations, etc., that he studies (Wilson, 1977:260).

The uniqueness of the competitive atmosphere of Suburban Elementary was shown through the development of categories of knowledge which the researcher initially discovered and refined through the study. These

categories were structured around the points of view of the children and teachers involved in competitive interaction. Williamson et al. state, "Sometimes these categories alone are sufficient for analysis because they are flexible enough to be molded around the events at hand" (1977:213).

There was an initial ordering and a continual re-ordering of data to gain an in-depth perspective. Smith (1979) explains:

> Eventually we have an outline which holds. It has a structure reflecting three major dimensions: integrity, complexity, and creativity. By integrity I mean it has a theme, a thesis, a point of view. The pieces fit together as an interrelated part-whole relationship. By complexity, I mean the outline has enough discriminable pieces to cover the major themes and the minor nuances, the large elements, and the nooks and crannies necessary to do justice to the system under study. Finally, by creativity, I mean the outline conveys some novel and important ideas to some relevant audience (p. 340).

## The Setting

The school was located in a middle to upper middle class area and served families who were considered predominately as professional in nature.

The building itself was surrounded by a very large, grassed playground that included baseball diamonds, soccer fields and community league facilities.

The school had ample inside space because of a low enrollment. Facilities included a gymnasium, a music room, a spacious library area, a large mudroom and seven classrooms, one for each of the six grades and a kindergarten.

In Mrs. Smith's room there was more than adequate space for seating eighteen children, which included an equal number of each sex. The class was not only taught by Mrs. Smith but also by Mr. Green for math and science and by Mr. White, the principal, for physical education.

## CHAPTER III

## THE TEACHER AS A COMPETITOR WITH CHILDREN

When the teacher and children came together at the beginning of each school day, both became involved in the educational process. The teacher was the link between school and the child. "Schooling . . . refers to the learning activities planned and conducted by a formally structured agency which influences individuals during a specified period" (Alberta Education, 1:1978). Within Suburban Elementary School, the teachers, Mrs. Smith, Mr. Green and Mr. White designed and carried out experiences which had an effect on the grade four pupils. They decided with what and how the children's time was to be occupied within the confines of the school. This included time in the classroom as well as physical education in the gymnasium. The teachers determined what the children would do with the time available.

The children, however, did not always concentrate on what the teacher planned for their time.

> Mr. Green is explaining addition of decimals while Mary is doing her weaving, Angie is erasing, Kim and Kathy are talking, Doug is playing with pieces of colored chalk and Ralph is flipping through the pages of his math workbook.
> (F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

Mr. Green had established the focus and objectives for time use and the children had not. The children were not using the time the way the teacher intended.

Mrs. Smith reminded or coerced the children to use the time in the way she wished.

> Kathy is talking to Nancy and not listening to a pretest given by Mrs. Smith.
>
> Mrs. Smith: Kathy, are you writing your spelling words? That's what you have to think about now.
> (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

Mrs. Smith attempted to establish a child's time priority.

> Mrs. Smith: Carl, you haven't given me a story yet. You should be working on that instead of Spell Binder.
> (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

Mrs. Smith redirected Carl's effort by suggesting what he should do with his time.

> Mr. Green: Are you paying attention? Put your pencil down Angie.
> (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

> In physical education class children are practicing skills involved in playing Newcomb Ball.

> Mr. White: Stop! Mary, when I say stop you leave the ball where it is.
> (Tape Recording of Ongoing Classroom Activity [T.R.O.C.A.]: February 23, 1982)

All the above teachers made demands on what the children should have done with their time.

Interaction between the teachers and the children that involved the use of time was observed and noted during ongoing classroom activity and was later confirmed through the interviewing of informants.

The Teachers' Perspective

A. Teachers Impose Their Will

The teachers were competing with the children to determine whose "will" for the use of time would prevail. To be sure that the children complied with teacher demands on their time, she resorted to certain strategies.

a) The teacher gave direct orders to her class.

> Mrs. Smith: Reread your answers.
> (F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

The teacher told her students what to do with their time in no uncertain terms.

b) The teacher asked questions.

i) Of Her Class

Researcher: Why do you think a teacher questions her class?

Mrs. Smith: To get feedback, to see if they're on the right track, listening skills - um - oral skills.

Researcher: To see if they're thinking?

Mrs. Smith: To see if they're thinking - yes.

Researcher: To see if they're listening?

Mrs. Smith: Yes.

(Informant Interview [I.I.]: April 22, 1982)

ii) Of Individuals

Researcher: Sometimes you ask them, "What have you been doing?" Why do you say that?

Mrs. Smith: To make them aware of time spans and what amount of work should be accomplished in a time span.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

iii) The teacher asked questions of children who did not volunteer to answer.

Researcher: There will be children who don't put their hands up but you still ask them. Why do you do that?

Mrs. Smith: Just to make sure they're listening to me.

Researcher: Sure.

Mrs. Smith: They're not just sitting there.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Asking questions was a way of checking to see if the children were doing what the teacher intended they do with their time. It was also a way in which she reaffirmed what a child should be doing with time alloted.

c) The teacher made threats.

Researcher: Sometimes you say, "Your parents are going to find out what you're doing in class." Why do you do that?

Mrs. Smith: As an incentive, because they're all very aware of parent pressure.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

This strategy was used when some children made a habit of not using their

time the way the teacher wished.

d) The teacher used reminders for children to keep working.

Researcher: Do you feel you have to use a lot of reminders?

Mrs. Smith: Yes.

Researcher: Sometimes for kids to keep working?

Mrs. Smith: Yes.

Researcher: What do you say? Can you give me an example of what you might say to a child?

Mrs. Smith: "Let's get going. Come on people. Five more minutes."

(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

The teacher's intention here was to have the children continue using their time in an approved way.

e) The teacher "suggested" to students what they could do when they had finished their work.

Researcher: One thing, is when they finish their work sometimes you say, "Well, when you finish this," say it's reading, you say, "Well, then you can do this." You give them something else to do. Why do you think you do something like that?

Mrs. Smith: Not so much to get them to finish the first one, cause usually they're working, I think, as well as they could. It's a small class so I can keep fairly close tabs on what they're doing and can tell if one is daydreaming. It's not really an incentive. It's basically to get the second thing done.

Researcher: Yes, to get that out of the road?

Mrs. Smith: To get that out of the way - the art or - and if it's a puzzle or something it's to keep them busy - thinking.

(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

The teacher used the time children had when they finished assignments to make sure unfinished work was completed and the children were kept busy.

f) The teacher assigned homework.

Mrs. Smith: I will give you the long weekend to finish your

"junk sculpture".
(F.N.E.: April 6, 1982)

The teacher listed homework assignments on the board.

Researcher: Sometimes you put homework on the board. Why do you do that?

Mrs. Smith: So they remember to take it home.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Homework occupied the children's time outside of school hours.

g) The teacher gave detentions for poor use of time.

Researcher: Keeping kids in - is that another way to - ?

Mrs. Smith: To get them to finish.

Researcher: Get them to do work?

Mrs. Smith: Yeah.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Detentions were a negative way to deter those who did not use their time as the teacher wished.

h) The teacher gave rewards for use of time.

Researcher: Do you ever reward children in some way when they finish their work?

Mrs. Smith: Usually just - I'm not a big little stars and little stamps kind of teacher. I don't know - I'm not into that at all. It's usually just oral.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Praise was a positive way to reinforce proper use of time.

B. Reasons Teachers Impose Their Will

The teacher was under a certain amount of pressure to keep the children occupied.

a) To complete the curriculum:

Mrs. Smith: Mind you, recently I've been assigning much more homework just to finish the curriculum.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

b) To keep children busy:

Mrs. Smith responded to a question about why she made suggestions to students on their use of free time.

Mrs. Smith: Keep busy.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

c) To set an example for some other children:

Mrs. Smith referred to a "speech" she made to her class earlier in the morning. More than a usual amount of children forgot to do their homework.

Mrs. Smith: I didn't give that big speech to the people who didn't finish. It was for the people who did . . . Teachers cannot change that much as far as work habits and personality are concerned . . . . No matter how I rant and rave, I cannot get Robert to achieve. That's the way he is and have to accept him like that.
(F.N.E.: March 23, 1982)

The teacher was in a position of responsibility. Her job was to teach the class and make sure the children responded to the methods she employed. She had to occupy their time in order to carry out this responsibility.

C. Teachers Soften Their Demands

The teachers, although they continually made demands on the children's time, also made it easier for the children to comply with these demands.

a) The teacher gave organizational tips to the class as a whole.

Mrs. Smith: I've made it even easier for you because I've put the page numbers down where the answers can be found.
(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

b) For individual children who could not cope with her demands as well as others, an adaptation was made.

i) A child did not always have to finish his work.

Mrs. Smith: A few things I don't even bother cause maybe, with Carl, let's say. His I.Q. is very low and he's just capable of so much. If he doesn't get it done, I don't - I tend not to sort of scold him as much as I would scold the others.
(I.I.: March 23, 1982)

ii) The teacher was careful when choosing the type of questions she asked certain people.

Researcher: What do you do to try to maybe make it a little easier for her?

Mrs. Smith: I tend to ask her questions I know she'll know the answer to.
(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

iii) A child did not always have to finish his work with the same quality as others.

Researcher: How about doing work over again? Do you ever have . . .

Mrs. Smith: . . . If they've done it badly once, I really don't think redoing it is necessary for people like, let's say, like Carl. I really don't think whatever he does I'm pleased with. He's doing his best.
(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

iv) The teacher helped her students.

Researcher: Are there some people in your class that get more help than other people?

Robert: Yeah. People have blue books and some people have green books for spelling and mostly people that aren't very smart, they get most of the help.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

The Children's Perspective

A. Children Impose Their Will

The children were competing with the teachers to determine whose "will" would prevail. Children also employed certain strategies in order to assert their will on how time was to be used. The children reacted to what the teacher assigned. Some reactions indicated that children had feelings of wanting some control over what they do and how they do it in the classroom.

a) By daydreaming:

Researcher: What is it like to do the work that Mrs. Smith gives you in class?

Robert: Some of it's easy and some of it's hard. Once you get the hang of it, it's really easy to do.

Researcher: Is it?

Robert: Yeah. Sometimes you just feel bored doing the work so you just sit around and look - like stare - just - you know - just think about things.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

b) By pretending:

Researcher: Sometimes when you don't want to do a lot of work in class, what do you do?

Robert: Sometimes I pretend I'm doing work.

Researcher: Do you?

Robert: Yeah. I just pretend I'm thinking.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

c) By dawdling:

Researcher: Are there any other things that you do other than just pretending to work? Do you do some other things so you won't have to do some of the things you're asked to do?

Robert: Yeah, like when we're writing stories, I ask if I can look in a book for ideas - like I just look in the book and read stories in the book and just waste some time.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

d) By talking to my friends:

Researcher: Are there any other things you do in class so you won't have to do some of the work?

Robert: Well, when my teacher's gone I talk to my friends.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

e) By drawing:

Researcher: Have you noticed any other people in your class doing things so they won't have to work?

Robert: Yeah.

Researcher: What are some of the things they do?

Robert: Some people they just, like in math or science, they're drawing circles on the backs of their books with pen and that. Then once it gets really

hard, they put their fingers on and make sort of like a stamp mark.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

f) By leaving the room:

Researcher: What do your friends do?

Robert: There's a kid, Doug. Well all he does, he just walks out of the room. He just goes. Like sometimes, he walks into the library. He doesn't ask.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

g) By "fiddling":

Researcher: What about Ralph? What does he do?

Robert: He takes his pencil and pretends he's a big cannon. He goes like this. He goes around firing, pretending he's shooting things.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

h) By copying other children's work:

Researcher: I noticed Mark looking at Rodney's answers. Why do you think he was doing that?

Robert: Just to get done faster because he wants to play on the boards or just sit down and stuff.

Researcher: So people -

Robert: So he won't have homework.
(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

i) By not bringing my books to class:

Researcher: Do <u>you</u> notice people in your class trying to do things so they won't have to work?

Angie: Yeah.

Researcher: Can you think of maybe, one thing that people do so they won't have to do something that Mrs. Smith asks them to do?

Angie: Yeah, sometimes they leave their books down at the bootrack and say they left them at home.
(I.I.: April 16, 1982)

j) By misplacing sheets:

Researcher: Are there some other things that they do so they won't have to do what Mrs. Smith asks them to do?

Angie: Yeah. Sometimes if they can, they rearrange their pages so they say that one of their pages are missing. Mrs. Smith's got to take some time getting their page back.
(I.I.: April 6, 1982)

k) By reading:

Researcher: Can you think of other ways the boys try to get out of work that you haven't talked about so far?

Angie: Well most of them just do what Robert and Ralph do. Oh, and another one. Doug, when Mrs. Smith is talking a lot, Doug gets out a book and reads and also when Mrs. Smith reads.
(I.I.: April 6, 1982)

l) By hiding:

Researcher: How about Mark? Does he try to get out of doing what Mrs. Smith wants him to do?

Angie: Oh, he does it quite a bit. He hides behind Carl's chair sometimes.
(I.I.: April 6, 1982)

m) By giving excuses:

Researcher: Do they do anything to try to get out of doing work?

Laura: Yeah, they give the teacher excuses like, they had to go to a birthday party or something.
(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

n) By walking around:

Researcher: What does Robert do?

Angie: Robert just gets up and walks over to his friend's desk.
(I.I.: April 6, 1982)

The children responded in a variety of ways to the teacher's intention of occupying their time. The children had their own intentions when it came to completing assignments. They did not always choose to respond to the teacher's intention in a way she approved of.

B. Reasons Children Impose Their Will

Children, even if they disliked what the teacher assigned, usually

complied with her wishes. It was a matter of degree as to the extent that a child frustrated the teacher's demands on their time. Some children complied almost completely and immediately while others went into temporary holding patterns, using the strategies already described. Nevertheless, children had reasons for not fully accepting and even avoiding what the teacher expected them to do.

a) Children did not always care about conforming to the teacher's wishes.

Researcher: Does anyone try to put more books on their book chart than anyone else?

Robert: Hardly any people care about those book wheels. (I.I.: April 20, 1982)

b) Children just did not like some activities. Reasons varied.

i) It's boring.

Researcher: What's it like to do the work Mrs. Smith gives you in class?

Robert: Some of it's easy. Some of it's hard. Once you get the hang of it, it's really easy to do.

Researcher: Is it?

Robert: Sometimes you just feel bored doing the work. (I.I.: April 7, 1982)

ii) I'm not in the mood.

Robert: Some days I get up really - like on my birthday I felt like doing work n' that - like I felt happy and did lots of work. I thought hard and some days when I'm mad I just don't work as well. (I.I.: April 7, 1982)

iii) It's too much.

Researcher: What kind of work do you like to do?

Angie: I like to do almost all of it because Mrs. Smith always explains it nicely n' things so I like to do most of the work except I'm not too keen on Social Studies.

Researcher: Oh! What is it about Social Studies sometimes that

you don't like to do?

Angie: We usually have to write down too much things like . . .

Researcher: Oh, you have to do a lot of writing?

Angie: Yeah, I like writing but not that much all at one time.

(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

v) It's too hard.

Researcher: How do you feel about doing work in Mrs. Smith's class and Mr. Green's class? How do you feel when they give you something to do?

Laura: Like sometimes if they give us too much homework then I don't like it.

Researcher: You don't really like it?

Laura: Yeah, when the work is difficult I don't like it but when it's easy I don't mind taking it for homework.

(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

c) Children questioned the importance of work.

Researcher: What do you think's important?

Robert: Nothing really. There's nothing in this school important.

(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Researcher: What is the difference between something that is important and something that isn't?

Laura: Well, something important is something that must be done.

Researcher: And something that isn't important doesn't have to be done?

Laura: Yeah.

(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

C. Children Comply with the Teachers' Demands

Children in Mrs. Smith's classroom completed the majority of assignments given. Most other demands were accepted and acted upon with varying amounts of expediency depending on the child's involvement and the

assignment given.

Children, as well as having reasons for not fully accepting the teacher's demands on their time, also had reasons for conforming to her wishes.

a) The children liked some activities. This feeling for an activity was often expressed by the expression, "It's fun". Work was fun for various reasons.

i) It had action in it.

Researcher: What do you like better, practising the skills or playing the game?

Robert: Playing the game.

Researcher: What is it about playing a game that you like?

Robert: Cause you have more action.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982).

ii) Work was not as boring as home.

Researcher: How do you feel about doing work in school?

Mark: Well, it's sort of fun and -

Researcher: What makes it fun?

Mark: Just, working and everything. And it's not boring like at home.
(I.I.: April 12, 1982)

iii) Work was easy.

Researcher: What makes work fun? Can you describe that to me?

Robert: Like I told you, treasure hunts are really exciting, so that's way I think they're fun. Like I sort of feel - like umm - I don't know but I can do it easier.
(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

iv) Work was something that no one else was asked to do.

Researcher: When you're in class and Mrs. Smith asks you to do something, okay - like work or answer a question or listen to her or how to use your free time. How does she make you feel when she asks you to do something?

Angie: It makes me feel happy because she - the way she - she's asking me to do something she's not asking the other kids to do.
(I.I.: April 6, 1982)

Researcher: When you see other people doing things in class, for example demonstrating for Mr. Green or pouring things for Mr. Green in front of the room. Do you want to do them too or do you care whether you do them or not?

Angie: I'd like to do them.
(I.I.: April 15, 1982)

v) The child was interested and he had an idea.

Researcher: What do you like writing about? Is there anything you like writing about?

Robert: Yeah, war, the future, the past.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

b) The children thought some of the activities that a teacher initiated were important.

i) To get an education:

Robert: I don't like school very much. I know it's important. You have to get an education and work.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

ii) To pass:

Researcher: Are tests important?

Laura: Yes, they are important, especially the final one.

Researcher: Why?

Laura: Because that's when you know if you're going to pass or fail.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

c) The children complied because the teacher would have found out when they did not and would use her authority to get them to comply.

i) The teacher gave detentions:

Researcher: How about finishing work first? Is that important?

Laura: Well - it isn't important in a way that - if you

finish work fast you'll get it right. It isn't important that way. But it is important when you finisn work - like sometimes she gives us detentions or something.

(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

ii) The teacher asked you a question:

Researcher: Do you always listen to her when she's talking?

Robert: Yeah, so I know what's going on.

Researcher: Yeah, because if you don't - if you don't listen what will happen?

Robert: You have to ask her again and she'll ask you if you were listening or not.

(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

iii) The teacher threatened:

Researcher: What does the teacher do to make sure that you do your work? What does she do . . .?

Robert: Like sometimes when you're talking loud, and like in art if you talk aloud she says, "Whoever talks, the table will have to clean up the art."

(I.I.: April 7, 1982)

Summary

THE TEACHER AS A COMPETITOR WITH CHILDREN

The Teachers' Perspective

A. Teachers Impose Their Will

B. Reasons Teachers Impose Their Will

C. Teachers Soften Their Demands

The Children's Perspective

A. Children Impose Their Will

B. Reasons Children Impose Their Will

C. Children Comply with the Teachers' Demands

The teacher and the child were put into a competitive situation when the child did not comply with the teacher's intentions of how time should be spent during occasions in the classroom and in the gymnasium. Their competition involved an attempt by the teacher to urge the child to submit to her intention while the child responded with an intention of his own. The child had intentions of not always doing the work or not

doing it in a manner prescribed by the teacher.

The teacher's intention to have the child comply with her requirements and the child's intention not to comply or at least, not in the suggested way, was manifested through various strategies that each party used. Both teacher and child expressed cause as to why their intention was worthy of acceptance. The teacher asked questions, made threats, reminded children to work, suggested what they should do, assigned homework, gave detentions and bestowed rewards to carry out her classroom teaching responsibilities. The child daydreamt, pretended, dawdled, talked, drew, left the room, fiddled, copied, forgot his books, misplaced sheets, read, hid and gave excuses because he either did not care about the work, did not like the work for various reasons or did not think the work was important.

The intensity of competition altered as to the assignment given and the children involved. Furthermore, this intensity dwindled when the assignment was given, the teacher, and children were more amenable to compromise. At times, the teacher often loosened her demands through providing helpful hints to her class and through allowing some children who could not cope as well as others, to accomplish either less work or a lower quality of work and to answer less difficult questions. The children were more likely to comply with the teacher's intention when they found the work fun (for a variety of reasons), saw the work as being important or because the teacher would use her position of authority to compel the child to finish.

Many children conformed almost completely while others did not. There were a few children who were frequently the object of the teacher's censure while others remained relatively unscathed by judgemental remarks.

The investigation of the teacher and child as co-competitors now

moves into the realm of peer group competition among children where the teacher acts as a facilitator of competition. The intention of the child and teacher shifts from the use of time to one of comparison of performance.

# CHAPTER IV

## CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION WITHIN THE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM

When the children in Mrs. Smith's class came together at the beginning of each school day, competitive situations became part of their interaction. Many experiences of children having the same intention occurred.

Competitive situations took place within the curriculum; the experiences that the teacher initiated. These experiences may or may not have been planned but they were at least related to or were a result of activities the teacher introduced.

The teacher intentionally structured children's interaction with a competitive orientation. She also "set the scene" for competition among children. In the former mode of competition, the teacher often compared performance of interacting children overtly. In the latter, the teacher introduced activities that were given a competitive orientation by the children. The children took it upon themselves to compare personal performances to performances of other children.

The researcher by noting the verbatim conversation and by describing interactions collected many instances of competition. This collection was presented to the teachers of the grade four class during interviews. The teacher stated whether he intentionally initiated the competitive situation or not. Observational and tape recorded data gave evidence to verify or bring into question these statements and also indicated whether the children's performances were openly compared or not.

The Teacher Planned Competition Within Her Curriculum and Compared Pupil Performance

All three teachers who worked with the grade four class purposefully initiated competitive situations and carried out activities that openly compared the performance of these children who competed. What the teacher initiated and how performance was compared was shown in five ways listed below.

i) Choosing one story from thirteen written

The following conversation concerned procedures that were used to choose a winner in a story writing contest. The winner's story was to be read during Education Week to an assembly of parents. Mrs. Smith was asked if she intentionally wanted to compare performance.

Researcher: What about writing a story for the talent show and voting on a winner? Do you think you, you . . .

Mrs. Smith: No, that was forced upon us and I'm not particularly crazy about what we had to do for that. No, I didn't want any competition there.

(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

Even though "picking a winner was forced" upon her, Mrs. Smith still carried out the activity with her class. Mrs. Smith did get competition as was illustrated by the responses to the researcher's question.

Researcher: Did you want your story to be picked?

Robert: Sort of. I don't like to stand up on stage and read out stories.

Donna: Yeah.

Kathy: No, it's dumb.

Kim: No, it's dumb.

Angie: Yeah.

Doug: No not really. It didn't really matter.

Mark: Sort of.

(F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

Performance was compared.

Mrs. Smith: I'd like to have our presentations of our creative writing stories so we can vote on the one that will be read on Thursday night of Education Week.
(F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

The stories were presented and voting was carried out through the use of secret ballot. The votes were counted on the blackboard. The number of votes for each person were indicated by the use of check marks and the totals of the children who received the greater proportion of votes were indicated on the blackboard.

Jim
11 Donna ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓
Rodney
Nancy ✓
Angie
5 Doug ✓✓✓✓✓
Carl ✓
Robert ✓✓

Bill
Kathy ✓
Kim ✓
5 Sheila ✓✓✓✓✓
5 Mark ✓✓✓✓✓

(a fieldnote copy of Mrs. Smith's handwritten voting results, February 24, 1982)

Mrs. Smith: Donna will be the presenter for our class.
(F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

The teacher's intent here was to pick a winner. This intention increased the children's desire to have their story chosen.

ii) Operetta auditions

Mrs. Smith and her colleagues planned an operetta which needed the participation of children in grades three to six. In order to cast the event, auditions were held.

Researcher: What about auditioning for the operetta? Did you want to intentionally compare performance there?

Mrs. Smith: Yes we had to.
(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

The children did compete.

Researcher: Were there some in grade four that were auditioning for the main part?

Mrs. Smith: Yeah.

Researcher: Is that right? Who was that? Who was auditioning in this room?

Mrs. Smith: For grade four: Angie, Kim, Beverly, Donna, Sheila.

Researcher: Is that right? What -

Mrs. Smith: Laura.

Researcher: What part is that exactly?

Mrs. Smith: That's the main frog.
(I.I.: March 23, 1982)

Performance was compared when the children were made aware of the successful candidates for the parts in the operetta.

Researcher: Have the teachers decided on the parts yet?

Angie: Yep.

Researcher: Oh, they have, eh?

Angie: Yes.

Researcher: What did they tell you when they finally decided who was going to play a part? How did they tell you? What did they say?

Angie: If you're going to be a special part then they'll come and tell you that you're going to be this part.

Researcher: Oh. Did they do it when you're alone so everyone else couldn't hear? When did they do it?

Angie: When you're in class.

Researcher: They just came in and announced it to everyone in class?

Angie: Yes.

Researcher: Who got to have parts in your class, like special parts?

Angie: Kim, Sheila, Mary and Donna.
(I.I.: April 8, 1982)

To carry out their intended performance, the teachers held auditions in which children were intent on gaining a part.

iii) The book chart

To urge children to read, Mrs. Smith had the children display their accomplishments.

Researcher: What about the book wheel? Is it your idea to compare performance there?

Mrs. Smith: Somewhat.

The children competed when a comparison was made as to how many books were read.

Jim: How many titles do you have on your chart?

Mark: I only have one.

Jim counts his out as Mark looks on.

(F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

Since the books read by each child were recorded on individual book wheels, the performance of children was compared when anyone chose to examine the wheels or when a statement was made by the teacher.

Mrs. Smith: People are not filling out their chart. Sheila, I can't believe you've only read two in the last two months.

Sheila, Jim, Doug, Angie, Mary, Laura and Kim go up and fill in their charts.

(F.N.E.: April 14, 1982)

The children's competitive intent was to read more books than other classmates.

iv) Floor hockey

Mr. Green initiated the establishment of a floor hockey intramural where eight teams, each made up of boys and girls in grades three to six competed in a type of round robin league.

Mr. Green: Everybody plays. Everybody gets on. They all have equal time.

Researcher: You know, when I was watching your floor hockey there was - everyone took turns playing and the kids were refereeing and you were there just to make sure everything went smoothly, I think.

Mr. Green: Yeah.

(I.I.: April 17, 1982)

The children competed.

Robert is referring to the floor hockey intramural in the following response.

Robert: Like right now, we want to win - to play against the teachers.

(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

Performance was compared.

Mr. Green has posted the point total of each competing team on a bulletin board outside the gym.

(F.N.E.: March 3, 1982)

The children's competitive intent was to have their team achieve a higher point total in order to play the teachers.

v) Physical education class

Instruction in this subject area involved the children in playing games. Teams were picked by the teacher and contests were held.

Researcher: Basically what are your goals when you teach phys. ed? What do you have in mind as kind of an outcome?

Mr. White: I guess two main things. One is trying to create an enjoyment of and, I don't know what, how to call it, but anyways to build within the students themselves an awareness of what their body can do. How enjoyable physical activity can be and involvement in the various games contributes to that. . . .

(I.I.: April 26, 1982)

The children competed in games the teacher used to achieve his intentions.

During a game of Newcomb in gym class various comments were recorded.

unidentified player: Great save!

unidentified player: Three all, we win!

After a point was scored:

unidentified player: Yeh! (clapping)

Announcements of score were made.

unidentified player: Six-four!

(T.R.O.C.A.: February 23, 1982)

Performance was compared when the teacher announced the score.

Mr. White: Nine-four.

The children's competitive intent was to win the game.

A. Reasons for Teacher Planned Competitive Interaction and Compared Performance

i) As an incentive for involvement:

Mrs. Smith was asked why she compared children using the book wheel.

Researcher: Why do you?

Mrs. Smith: As an incentive to get them reading. To see what others are reading cause I know they are competitive that way and would like them to see how many books others have read.

(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

ii) To have the best:

Researcher: What about the operetta? Did you intentionally want to compare performance there?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, we had to.

Researcher: Why do you think you had to?

Mrs. Smith: To pick the best.

(I.I.: April 23, 1982)

iii) The children want it that way:

Researcher: Did you see anything at all about your floor hockey where people were compared or anything at all that . . .

Mr. Green: Oh yeah, they do compare themselves and they've asked me to - They like to keep track of who got the most goals and things of this nature. Where the teams are . . .

(I.I.: April 27, 1982)

iv) To allow fair competition:

Researcher: When you teach skills and games or when afterwards the kids play in a game whether it's Newcomb or scatter dodgeball or whatever you're doing at the time, do you ever find that you intentionally compare performance at all?

Mr. White: I intentionally compare performance. I have to within the gym program because, for example, if I'm doing a, well you suggested Newcomb - what I want is equal abilities working with equal ability so they get a little bit of a challenge and a little bit of enjoyment . . .

Researcher: And when they're playing games, I notice that you - the way you divide the teams up - it's usually girls against girls, boys against boys which is kind of a way to have equal people playing together.

Mr. White: Right, and that's the purpose. That can pose problems because they get the feeling the boys are better than the girls and unfortunately that, for the most part, is true.
(I.I.: April 28, 1982)

The teacher's intention was to have the children compete for various reasons. It was admitted by Mr. White that this competition "can pose problems because they get the feeling the boys are better than the girls".

B. Teacher Concern About the Effect of Competition on Children

Each of the three teachers, even though they intentionally carried out competitive activity with the children, were aware of the possible effects of this interaction.

i) Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith made a conciliatory comment to her class after the votes were counted and a decision was made as to who would read their story for Education Week.

Mrs. Smith: Good work! Everyone has a good story. They'll all be posted. Your art will also be put up.
(F.N.E.: February, 1982)

ii) Mr. Green

Competition in floor hockey was of concern.

Researcher: Are there any ways that you can think of that you kind of cushion the competitive thing - like, say in your floor hockey, are there any ways -

Mr. Green: I do have rules that I speak about when they begin the floor hockey. The main reason is participation,

> exercise, fun and also to try to do the best you can and I don't say we don't want to win but I put an emphasis on sportsmanship as well, so that when the points are awarded to the winning teams, it's not just a straight win as to how you can get points for your team. There's points for participation, sportsmanship and for winning the game.
> (I.I.: April 27, 1982)

iii) Mr. White

In physical education class, where the child attempted to achieve in the same activities as others, and where performance was so visible, the teacher was aware of the competitive effect.

> Researcher: Do you ever pick certain people for praise more than others?
>
> Mr. White: Not intentionally. In fact, sometimes I will. Sometimes the best player gets less praise from me than the weakest player cause I make a conscious effort to make sure that, you know, Ralph who has a lot of trouble, anything that I see him do well, I'll point out whereas Doug, who's starting to get his act together and is doing well, I probably don't give him as much praise because it goes straight to his head. He already thinks he's the best in there.
> (I.I.: April 28, 1982)

A point of inquiry came to mind; "Did the teacher's concern have any influence on the competitive effect?" Just because the teacher's intention was to lessen the negative feelings of losing, does not mean the children were shielded from these feelings. The second point of inquiry was, "What was the child's intent when he was involved in competitive interaction?" It may have been not to compete at all thus freeing himself from the competitive effect.

C. Children's Intentions

There was a wide range of intent on the part of the children when the teacher purposefully initiated competition and compared performance. Some children chose not to participate. Some participated but did not have the intention of winning or being the best.

i) They chose not to participate.

Researcher: What about the operetta - when people were asked to audition for the operetta? Do you think it's important to - ?

Robert: I don't like standing out talking and that.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

ii) They chose not to do better.

Researcher: What about the floor hockey? Do you think it's important to do better than other people in floor hockey that you play?

Robert: No, but it's fun.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

When the child chose not to participate, he may have begun to free himself from any competitive effect. This effect may have been less potent when his intention in participating was not to win. One wonders at the effect of competitive interaction when a child competes to win.

A way out was offered to children when the teacher chose not to make participation compulsory. The floor hockey and the operetta were examples of voluntary competition. Many children in grade four intended not to take part. The story contest, physical education class and to some extent the book chart were obligatory, yet even at the teacher's urging some children chose not to write down any reading accomplishments. Within these latter competitions, however, some children chose not to be the best.

The Teacher Planned Competition Without an Overt Effort to Compare Performance

There were instances when the teacher did not actively compare the performance of children in initiating planned competitive activity. She did not make a point of openly declaring who was best or who was the winner, even though she wanted children to compete.

The teacher questioned children who then put their hands up to answer.

Researcher: When you ask kids questions in class, on science or math, and you want answers from them, are you trying to compare their performance or exactly why do you do that? Why do you ask kids questions?

Mr. Green: As far as the competitive aspect, I often will ask questions in such a manner to, you know, it sets up a little competition cause kids want to answer the question.
(I.I.: April 27, 1982)

The children's competitive intent was to answer the question.

The teacher also initiated math or other subject area games. Children were asked to demonstrate for the class and were requested to write answers on an overhead projector or on the blackboard. Children revealed their intention to participate by raising their hands and in this way competed in order to be involved. As a result, the teacher received the input he wanted.

Researcher: What about when Mrs. Smith asks the whole class a question and people put their hands up to answer? Is there anyone who tries to answer the questions before anyone else?

Robert: Yeah, like Kim. She goes "uh, uh." I know, she stands up on her chair.
(I.I.: April 4, 1982)

The teacher's intention was the involvement of his pupils while the children's competitive intent was to be involved. Some children not only wanted to answer or to be chosen as a demonstrator, they intended to act before others.

## The Teacher "Set the Scene" for Competitive Interaction in Which Children Initiated Competition

The teacher, through her curriculum created situations where children found themselves having the same intentions. The teacher did not intentionally structure these situations in a competitive way, but the children did. They even made attempts to compare their performance with fellow

competitors.

Researcher: Can you name some people who try to do better than other people at things?

Laura: Sheila, Kathy, Kim and I myself do.

Researcher: You do, too? What about the boys? Are there any boys that try to do better than other people at things?

Laura: Doug and Jim.
(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

Areas where the children competed included academic accomplishments and accomplishments peripheral to the curriculum.

A. Academic Accomplishments

Children interacted competitively with the intentions of comparing their performance directly through the use of marks, by obtaining the correct answer or via showing an unusual interest in another child's quality of work. These competitive situations were scholastic in nature and included the receiving of marks on report cards, tests and ordinary papers, finding solutions to puzzles and questions posed by the teacher and writing compositions.

a) Report cards

Two unidentified children were discussing the contents of their report cards.

Child one: What did you get?

Child two: B - B, A, A, A okay I got n' A, A, A - A, B.

Child one: I got, A, A, A, two B's.
(T.R.O.C.A.: March 17, 1982)

b) Tests

Mr. Green handed back marked science and math tests. Two children compared their marks.

Kathy: I got seventy-two percent.

Mary: I got one hundred percent.
(T.R.O.C.A.: March 17, 1982)

c) Ordinary papers

Researcher: What are ordinary papers?

Laura: Like, ordinary papers are like sheets. She sometimes gives us worksheets. We talk about something, and then she gives us some work on it - Mrs. Smith - and that's what I meant by ordinary sheets. They are not tests.

Researcher: Oh, they're just like worksheets?

Laura: Yeah.

Researcher: Sometimes, when you do worksheets - are there any other ways that you know how they've done?

Laura: Like if we're sitting next to a person, we just peek at the other person's paper and then we know if they got it all right.

Researcher: How do you know just by looking at the paper?

Laura: The marks. She gives us fourteen out of fifteen or twenty out of thirty.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

Because the teacher gave the children marks, she facilitated competition where performance could be compared. The children's competitive intent was to see who had the higher mark.

d) Puzzles

The teacher assigned or a child presented a puzzle to the class. The children were asked to solve it.

Mrs. Smith asked her class to unscramble words in a sentence about Indians.

Kathy: Did you make "pemmican"?

Doug and Eric: I did the whole thing.

Sheila is told not to tell the others an answer.

Kim: Shhhh!

Sheila: I got it. I got it.
(F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

e) The right answer

Estimating brought a competitive aspect into math class. Who could estimate the correct answer?

> Mr. Green asked Kim to fill a larger container with a smaller one. The rest of the class were asked to estimate how many smaller containers were needed.
>
> Robert: I say five.
>
> Bill: I say five and a half.
>
> Mark: I say six.
>
> (F.N.E.: April 15, 1982)

The competitive intent was to be the first to get the right answer or at least get the answer correct.

f) Composition writing

Upon a reaction by their teacher, interest in each others' poems became pronounced.

> Mrs. Smith: Excellent. I'd like to read Mary's poem. She has a rhyming system. There's a rhythm to it.
>
> The poem is read by Mrs. Smith. Kathy then reads her poem to Mrs. Smith. Mary and Angie turn around and listen. Mary reads Sheila's poem. Donna reads Kathy's poem.
>
> (F.N.E.: March 11, 1982)

Showing an uncommon interest in another's work pointed to the possibility of competitive intent.

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

Acquiring the use of free time materials; being with the partner one wants; finishing work first; obtaining the teacher's attention were all seen as competitive situations initiated by the child. These situations were not strictly part of the program of studies but could be described as being "side-effects" of the teacher's attempt to implement it in a functioning social setting.

a) Using free time materials

Children competed for the use of games and records when they finished assignments given.

Researcher: What about the girls? Do they try to do better than other people?

Robert: Yeah. They try to - like sometimes the girls try to get done - one girl tries to get done as fast as she can and she rushes over - like at the beginning of the year, we had games - she rushed over to the table and got the games and all waited until the girls came and got them. Like when a boy came over there, she wouldn't let him have it.

(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

The competitive intent was to play with the game before a member of the boy's group could use it.

b) Choosing partners

The teacher often requested that each child pick a partner for an activity. This activity frequently involved two children wanting the same partner.

Researcher: Is there any one girl that is popular as a choice for a partner?

Angie: Well, Jane is sometimes.

Researcher: You mean that usually people would like to be her partner?

Angie: Yeah.

Researcher: How does she choose partners if so many people want to be her partner?

Angie: She just chooses her best friend out of them all.

(I.I.: April 15, 1982)

The children competed for a particular partner.

c) Finishing work first

Researcher: Do people in your room try to beat each other at doing things in Mrs. Smith's room?

Robert: Yeah, sometimes.

Researcher: Can you give me an example of someone who tries to beat someone else?

Robert: Yeah like Doug he just works - one time he was having a race against Jim and he put down his watch like for timing to see who could be the first. Jim won.
(I.I.: April 4, 1982)

Getting finished first was the intent.

d) Getting the teacher's attention

Children formed lines so the teacher could deal with each child separately. Children competed for a place in line. This competition was revealed when a child made a statement about how the position in line was determined.

Researcher: What do you mean? Who's coming up first should get in line first?

Angie: Like the person whoever gets out of their chair and starts walking up to her first, she should really let them go first because some people are nearer to the desk than others, so it takes people that are far away from the desk longer to get to Mrs. Smith's desk. Like Ralph's right next to it so he can . . .

Researcher: So he can get in line first?

Angie: Yeah.
(I.I.: April 19, 1982)

Getting a place in line was only one way the children competed for the teacher's attention. Other ways included speaking out without raising hands, raising hands to ask the teacher a question regarding a problem, interrupting the teacher while she conversed with another student, and when two or three students approached the teacher at one time without forming a line.

## The Teacher Facilitated the Children's Comparison of Performance

The result of competitive interaction of this kind is, if not immediately, ultimately known to the interested parties. The child, usually through a verbal response from fellow competitors or a nonverbal cue such as a mark at the top of the page, realized who had achieved a

higher degree of performance.

The teacher aided in the indication of performance in a number of ways.

a) Compliments and criticism

Researcher: How do you know when a person in your room has succeeded at something? Has succeeded well at something?

Laura: Our teacher, she talks aloud about it to the child who gets it right or wrong. Like, for example, when Sheila gets it all right, she says, "Very good, you got it all right." Sometimes when people get it wrong, she tells them the mistake aloud.

Researcher: So the teacher says it aloud so you know whether the person has succeeded or - okay, well, so how do you know a person hasn't succeeded at something? Has not done that well, on something? Has gotten mistakes? How do you usually know that that person has gotten mistakes?

Laura: Because sometimes if we're sitting far away we still know because the teacher stands at their desk and it's like she's explaining something to the person and usually she does that when a person gets something wrong.

(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

b) Announcing marks

Researcher: What does she try to do better in? Can you think of some things?

Laura: Like sometimes she remembers a lot of things and the teacher always calls out the marks in just ordinary papers and she always gets the highest mark.

(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

c) Asking questions of the class

Mr. Green is speaking to his class.

Mr. Green: How many had that right? How many made a mistake there?

The children put up their hands to show if they were correct or incorrect.

(F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

This show of hands allowed children to compare one another's performance.

d) Children were asked to make public their answers

This occurred when a child read his composition to the class, presented a puzzle he devised for solution by other class members or did a math question on the board.

Researcher: Does it ever happen in this room where people try to do better than other people?

Angie: When we have to answer things on the board . . . (I.I.: April 15, 1982)

e) Children were put into groups

The teacher assigned children to different reading and spelling groups in order to individualize instruction. The children were aware that people in one group performed differently from ones in another.

Researcher: What is the difference between the spelling groups?

Jim: They don't have as hard words as we do. They have as hard words as we do but they're easier for us. (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

Through her conversation and actions, the teacher simplified the process whereby the children could compare their achievement.

Indirect Factors that Facilitated the Comparison of Performance

A. Academic Accomplishments

Competition and subsequent comparison of performance was not only aided by the overt intervention of the teacher (such as announcing test scores). Indirect elements also made a contribution to the competitiveness of children in scholastic endeavors.

Mrs. Smith had certain expectations of her pupils. These expectations were seen as important. Situations that are important to the teacher were described by Laura as being "musts".

Laura: Something important is something that must be done.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

Researcher: What about getting marks on tests? Are tests important?

Laura: Yes, they are important, especially the final one.

Researcher: Why?

Laura: Because that's when you know if you're going to pass or fail.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

A competitive situation of this type was facilitated when one child perceived that his performance was good. Comparing performance depended on whether the child did well on a test or not. They were less likely to inquire as to another's mark if they thought their mark was not that good.

Researcher: When they get their test mark back, what do people do?

Laura: Sometimes if it's bad, they don't show it to people but if it's good they do show other people.
(I.I.: April 20, 1982)

Children wanted to satisfy the intention of having the correct answer to "save face". The children employed procedures and schemes to be certain of correctness.

Researcher: Mr. Green asks you to do math questions on the board?

Angie: Yeah, when we're marking it. And they might of asked Mr. Green to help them with this question.

Researcher: While they're doing it on the board?

Angie: Not while they're doing it but when they've got it in their book.

Researcher: Yes.

Angie: Then the next day, they'll go and do it on the board, but when they're doing it in their book some people might go and ask Mr. Green if he can help them with it so then they'll - that they'll got the question right.
(I.I.: April 15, 1982)

Competition and subsequent comparison of performance was facilitated because of the involvement of the opposite sex. The girls wanted to get even with the boys.

Researcher: Why do you try to do better than Robert? Is there any reason why you'd pick Robert?

Angie: Well sometimes because he always tries throwing snowballs at girls and thinks that they (girls) are horrible.

Researcher: Oh yeah. So you -

Angie: He thinks they're (girls are) bad at everything so we (girls) try n' get them (boys) to get worse marks than us (girls) so that they (boys) wouldn't think that we're (girls are) worse.
(I.I.: April 8, 1982)

Vindictiveness made competition easier.

Researcher: Who do you try to do better than? Who do you try to beat? Do you ever try to beat someone on a test?

Angie: Yes, I try n' beat Kim.

Researcher: Do you?

Angie: Sometimes, yeah.

Researcher: Oh yeah.

Angie: Cause she's always boasting.
(I.I.: April 8, 1982)

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

Competitive success when using free time materials, choosing partners, finishing work first and getting the teacher's attention did not rely on the overt pronouncements of the teacher. The teacher did not make a point of indicating the performance of children in these cases. The teacher did, however, indirectly influence competitive intent.

Importance was also linked to nonscholastic endeavors and was a facilitator of competition.

Researcher: How about finishing work first? Is that important?

Laura: It is important when you finish work - like sometimes she gives us detentions or something.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

Competing for the teacher's attention became necessary if a child wanted to finish his work. The child required problems to be solved and questions answered before he could carry on with his assignment.

> I was talking to Mrs. Smith for the first time. While this was going on, two children attempted to gain her attention. I believe they wanted to correct work and go home since it was already past 3:30.
>
> (J.E.: January 29, 1982)

Previous interview data describing the use of free time materials showed that competition from the opposite sex was a facilitator of nonacademic competition as well.

Children had to choose their own partners on the request of the teacher, a facilitator. This situation became competitive when more than one child attempted to choose the same person.

Children's Competitive Intentions Varied

Some children chose not to compete academically or otherwise. Furthermore, even though children participated in the same situation, their intent was not always the same as other participants'.

Children put conditions on the importance of trying to do better than other children.

Researcher: Do you think it's - that - any of the boys in your room think it's important to do better in school - like in social studies or language arts or math or science?

Robert: Not unless they really like it.

Researcher: Yes.

Robert: Like me, I really like social studies a lot. I don't care what it's about but I do like social studies.

Researcher: Is that right? Do you think Doug and Jim think

it's important to do better?

Robert: No, in social studies, they don't like it. They like math, and language arts.

Researcher: They like math and language arts better?

Robert: Yeah.

Researcher: How do you know they like math and language arts better?

Robert: Because at social studies' time they usually - Doug he doesn't work very fast and he just sits there drawing on the back of his book.

Researcher: What does he do in math and language arts that is different?

Robert: He works faster than everyone. He gets more and more sheets to do n' things like that.
(I.I.: April 22, 1982)

When a child was perceived to be "not very good" at school, he was judged as not wanting to do better than others.

Researcher: Is there a person who doesn't seem to want to do better than other people? Who doesn't care? Who doesn't try to do better than other people?

Angie: Ralph.

Researcher: Ralph doesn't? Why don't you think Ralph - what does Ralph do that tells you he doesn't really want to do better?

Angie: Well, he got a - well he'd like to do better but he doesn't really want to. Do you see what I mean?

Researcher: He doesn't really try to?

Angie: Right. He'd like to do a bit better than he is doing now, but he doesn't - want to do better than everybody else because he's already - he's in the green spellers and he's not too good at many things.
(I.I.: April 19, 1982)

## Teachers' Awareness of Children's Competitive Interaction

### A. Academic Accomplishments

The teacher realized that the receiving of test results led to comparisons. The teacher considered the manner in which she informed the children of test results.

> Researcher: When you give a test, are you intentionally comparing performance?
>
> Mrs. Smith: No, it's for my report card mark.
>
> Researcher: Right. Okay.
>
> Mrs. Smith: I don't usually have them tell one another - really. Having them read their mark orally as I did this morning with the French tests - it was not so others could hear their mark - It was just so that I didn't have to walk all the way around and get the mark from them. It was to save time.

When a child attempted to solve a puzzle in order to get an answer, the teacher gave those who were having difficulty a clue.

> Mrs. Smith aided the student who was having problems unscrambling Indian-related words. Beverly was having difficulty with "sausqw" (squaws) and "siebrre" (berries).
>
> Mrs. Smith: Who makes pemmican? What do they mix it with?
> (F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

### B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

The teacher tried to avoid competition for her attention.

> Mrs. Smith speaks to her class.
>
> Mrs. Smith: I'll come around and read your stories. I don't want you to put up your hands.
> (F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

The teacher attempted to avoid competition for free time materials.

> Mrs. Smith had to solve the problem of having not enough earphones for everyone to use the listening center at once.
>
> Mrs. Smith kept on avoiding competition for earphones - When a new person came in she would check to see if one of the people with earphones had dry paint on the art work so they could go

on with art and leave their earphones for someone else.
(F.N.E.: February 23, 1982)

By maneuvering children (who had already used the earphones) onto other projects, Mrs. Smith made room for children who as yet had not had a chance to use the listening center.

Because children raced one another to finish work, the teacher penalized children who rushed and lowered the quality of their work as a result. The penalty was often answers marked incorrect.

Researcher: Do you try to get finished first sometimes?

Mark: Yeah, sometimes but, I don't try n' get finished first if it means that I have to go faster and don't get the answers right.
(I.I.: April 21, 1982)

The teacher was aware that when children chose their own partners, someone may have been left out.

Researcher: How do you deal with picking partners for people? Do you just usually let them pick their own or -

Mr. White: What I'll do at the beginning of the year, is I'll let them pick their own and I'll watch who they pick and if I find partners they're selecting - there's somebody always left out, then I'll usually assign their partners.
(I.I.: April 28, 1982)

Summary

CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION WITHIN THE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM

The Teacher Planned Competition Within Her Curriculum and Compared Pupil Performance

A. Reasons for Teacher Planned Competitive Interaction and Compared Performance

B. Teacher Concern About the Effect of Competition on Children

C. Children's Intentions

The Teacher "Set the Scene" for Competitive Interaction in Which Children Initiated Competition

A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

The Teacher Facilitated the Children's Comparison of Performance

The Teacher Planned Competition Without Overt Effort to Compare Performance

Indirect Factors that Facilitated the Comparison of Performance

A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

Children's Competitive Intentions Varied

Teachers' Awareness of Competitive Interaction

A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

This type of competition involved children competing amongst themselves. It included children striving to satisfy the same intentions as others, often with an accompanying comparison of performance. These competitive intentions were the consequence of the teacher either planning competitive interaction and comparing the children's performance or they came about through the teacher's facilitation. In this latter instance, the children initiated competition and compared their performances with the teacher's patronage.

The teacher intended to have the children compete. This intention went hand-in-hand with a comparison of performance. The teacher: picked the "best" story, chose roles for an operetta, had children list the books they read on a chart, formed a floor hockey league and organized games in physical education class. In each instance the performance of the children was compared through the teacher's demeanor. Although the teacher was concerned about the "competitive effect" on the children, the activities were nevertheless carried out for reasons stated by the teacher. The intention to compete varied depending on the children involved and the activity. If the activity was involuntary the child had to take part

and competition followed. In other activities such as the operetta auditions, he was given a choice. When the child did compete, as was the teacher's intention, his intention was sometimes merely to take part and not necessarily to win.

The teacher planned competition to have the children involved but did not make an overt attempt to compare performance. The children who competed in these situations, intended more often than not to be involved in what the class was doing.

The children were also a part of competitive interaction they initiated in the presence of the teacher's influence. The children's scholastic intentions were to compare performances when receiving evaluative marks, to solve puzzles first, and to answer correctly before anyone else could. The children also had the intentions of competing in non-scholastic areas which included using free time materials so others could not, choosing a partner someone else wanted, finishing work first and getting the teacher's attention ahead of others. Scholastically, the teacher facilitated competitive intentions both overtly and in more indirect ways. Outside of the scholastic sphere competition was made easier in more covert ways. The children's competitive intentions varied from not competing, competing but not wanting to win and competing to win. Again, the teacher was aware of the children's competition and took steps either to alleviate its presence or its effects.

The investigation of the children's competitive intent within the teacher's domain gave way to an understanding of children's competition in a child's sphere of influence.

## CHAPTER V

## CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION OUTSIDE OF THE TEACHER'S CURRICULUM

Before the bell rang in the morning, at noon break and during recess break from the classroom, the children of Mrs. Smith's class played game-like activities. These activities took place on the playground surrounding the school where the teacher was not involved as an initiator or a facilitator of their play. The play was planned by the children and any competitive interaction as a result of this play was child initiated.

> As I went outdoors with Jim, Mark and Doug an activity was suggested.
>
> Jim: Let's play push-off-the-hill.
> (F.N.E.: February 23, 1982)

During the times the children were involved in free play, game-like activities, the researcher was present either as an observer or as a participant.

### Game of Raiders

> After a session of raiders during recess the researcher questioned Robert about it.
>
> Researcher: What was that game you're playing?
>
> Robert: Attack.
>
> Researcher: You mean you attack other people's forts?
>
> Robert: Yes, Raiders.
> (F.N.E.: February 8, 1982)

> While observing another Raiders session, inquiries were made and conversation was recorded which elaborated upon the children's intent.
>
> Kim: Those boys are trying to raid us.
>
> Researcher: What are they doing when they raid you?

Kathy: They throw ice bombs at us. The boys are throwing ice bombs at us.

Mark: Let's get in their forts.

Kathy: Let's raid their fort.

Boys: Charge!

(F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

Inside by the coatracks, Kathy was asked about the activity outcome.

Researcher: Who won Raiders?

Kathy: Nobody.

(F.N.E.: February 17, 1982)

Because of the heavy winter snowfall, the snow had been plowed from the parking lot and the tarmac and piled into mounds that were positioned just northeast of the bicycle racks. Groups of children in grade four each claimed a different mound and designated it as their fort. On at least one occasion the children divided into teams according to sex. In the beginning, the object of the activity was to raid the other team's fort or merely try to run into it and try to stay there doing damage such as kicking the opposition team's collection of snowblocks over. The basic intent of the group was to win the other group's territory. The game changed later on when one group not only ran to the other team's mound but began throwing snow chunks at the opposition players. There was no mention of any particular rules or penalties for not obeying them. The activity usually continued until the bell rang, and the children had to return to their class.

Game of Push

Mark, Doug, Ralph and Carl were playing with the grade three's on an ice patch beside the bicycle racks. The game was called "Push". Once again the action involved was the main focus.

Researcher: What were you guys trying to do out there?

Mark: I was just trying to stay up.
(F.N.E.: February 22, 1982)

A day of warm weather had melted the snow forming a pool of water on a low lying area on the southwest corner of the tarmac. The water had subsequently solidified forming a sheet of ice. Some of the boys in Mrs. Smith's class along with a few younger children in grade three, took advantage of the situation. They began sliding on the ice. This soon turned into an activity where children were first sliding into others then intentionally pushing and shoving each other making it difficult for some to remain on their feet. Everyone seemed to be for himself and battle cries of "push, push" were heard just before an unsuspecting participant was shoved. The children's intent was to merely stay on one's feet while taking any opportunity to shove another child.

Game of Push-Off-the-Hill

Enroute to the playground for recess, I accompanied Jim, Mark and Doug:

Jim: Let's play Push-off-the-hill.

They begin playing, using snow piled up on the east side of the daycare wall. The object is to push everyone else off the hill and keep yourself on top. I offered to join in voluntarily and was accepted. I used one arm so it would be fairer. The game continued.

Jim: Stop, I have snow in my boots.

Everyone complied with Jim. Robert, Donald and Bill joined in.

Eric: Let's play again in the afternoon.

(Everyone who came to play was accepted except a grade three student that Jim rejected.) I asked Mark and Jim about the game:

Researcher: Was there a winner?

Mark: (shaking his head) We just formed two-man teams.

Jim: It was just for fun.
(F.N.E.: February 23, 1982)

The game continued during recess that afternoon.

> The same six boys were present with two grade four girls joining in. They were Donna and Kim. Although the object of the game was to stay on top of the bank, children even wanted to be pulled down. The down action was as exciting as staying on top.
>
> Kim to the Researcher: Pull me down.
>
> Kim to Kathy: You can't play because then there will be too many.
>
> Jim to Researcher: The girls are playing - We'll have to be gentler.
> (F.N.E.: February 23, 1982)
>
> On a third occasion:
>
> Kathy, Sheila and Beverly joined in. Robert and Kim did not show up.
>
> Sheila: Grade fours only.
>
> I addressed Mark in the shelter room afterwards.
>
> Researcher: Were there teams?
>
> Mark: Eric's team and then everyone else.
> (F.N.E.: February 24, 1982)

A heavy snowfall was responsible for the formation of a large bank of snow against the east side of the school. Team structure was very flexible and not always adhered to. People joined in and left the activity at will or changed teams frequently. It seemed to be more important to keep oneself on top of the bank and not so much any team that you might be on. The children kept on top by pushing others down or leaning tightly against the school wall so others could not get behind them. A "sneak attack" was the prime strategy. Some participants did not seem to care so much about staying on top. They even made requests to be pulled down or at times just fell down through their own efforts. Allowances were made for people who wanted a stoppage in play because of snow-filled boots or for girls who had to be treated differently. A set

of rules was not at all formally set down but the grade four's did set limits on the number playing by not allowing new participants from grade four once the activity got going or by excluding children from other grades. A winner was not declared, partially due to the fact that team structure was not at all rigid. The children's competitive intent was to stay on top of or "own" the hill.

Game of Push-Off-the-Mountain

> The snow had been pushed off the tarmac into two large "mountains" of snow. The grade five's had taken over the steepest one. Robert, Ralph, Carl and Donald went over and challenged them.
>
> Researcher to Robert: What are you going to do?
>
> Robert: Get them off.
>
> Robert to Donald: Let's sneak around to the other side.
>
> In class, later on:
>
> Doug: We were having a fight on the hill.
>
> Doug and Jim were on the grade five team.
> (F.N.E.: March 3, 1982)

The presence of the large, mountainous snowhills allowed competitive interaction where definite teams were drawn on the basis of grade level and included only boys. Competition was quite intense with strategy playing a more central role in an attempt to defeat the other team by taking over the mountain.

Game of Tag

> Carl, Robert, Bill, Donald and Mark were playing tag. They used the snowhills, crevices, monkey bars, and bike stands as obstacles to get away from the person who is "it".
>
> Researcher: Who's it?

Robert: Are you playing?

I nodded.

Robert yelled to the others.

Robert: Dennis is playing.

Robert to Bill: Pretend you're it so I can touch Ralph.

Bill agreed and Ralph was "it". The players stayed close to the person who was "it". (Why? It was as if they wanted to be caught.)

Bill to Robert: Times.

Robert did not make an attempt to tag him.
(F.N.E.: March 11, 1982)

The part of the playground used for this game seemed to shift with the position of the person being "it". The game went where the "it" person was. Each participant, wanting to be involved, stayed close to the "it" person but was ready to flee, using any obstacle to make a successful get-away, upon being pursued. Using obstacles to separate one from the pursuer was not the only strategy. Although everyone was for himself, players would collaborate in order to catch another. The activity continued after the bell rang and into the school building where everyone tried to avoid being the last one "it".

Game of Hockey

The presence of community league facilities enabled the grade four's to initiate an ice hockey-like activity.

The grade four children asked Mr. White if they could play hockey at school. The grade six and five boys had already received permission to use the big rink. The grade four's used a smaller patch of ice on the south side of the community league dressing rooms.

(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

With sticks and puck in hand and without skates, the children carried out the hockey activity. I followed the boys out. Robert said he was going to clean the ice. When I got there Kathy and Sheila were there shooing the kindergarten kids off a small patch of ice.

Kathy: Get off the ice. You're going to get hurt.

The kids went off without protest. With Sheila watching, the boys of room five (Doug, Jim, Donald and Ralph) began playing hockey on the little sheet of ice. Robert arrived.

Robert: I can't find the janitor.

The ice had a layer of snow on it and didn't get cleaned because Robert couldn't get the shovel from the janitor. (The boys were prepared to clean the ice.) The boys played on the ice anyway using pylons for goal posts and a sponge rubber puck.

Robert: We don't want to get all of the snow off anyway because then the ice gets too slippery.

Robert let Sheila use his stick so she could play. He watched.

Robert to Ralph: Get in your goal.

Ralph: There's no action down here.

As the bell rang, Robert addressed me.

Robert: We will come back early at noon, clean the ice and still have time to play.

On the way from recess:

Doug: We beat them.

Researcher: What was the score?

Doug: One-zero.

Researcher: How did you pick teams?

Doug: We just decided.

(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

During noonhour, the researcher became a participant. Upon the researcher's arrival on the scene:

Robert: Dennis is coming. He's going to play.

Robert to the Researcher: Hurry up.

As soon as I got on the ice:

Robert to everyone there: Dennis and me will stand.

The rest of the children objected.

The rest: Dennis and Dino.

It was decided that I and Dino would stand. Dino was in grade two and we played against four grade four boys.
(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

The game continued the next recess that afternoon.

I got the shovel and cleaned part of the ice but quit when one-half of it was finished so we could play. Ralph was put on my team with Dino. Bill, Jim, Doug and Mark were on Robert's team.

Mark: I haven't had any action.

The ridge of snow that separated the uncleaned section from the cleaned ice was used as a center line on a suggestion from Bill.
(F.N.E.: March 17, 1982)

The next day, more structure was introduced into the game.

Researcher: Who stands?

Bill: Me and Dennis.

Robert appoints himself referee.

Robert: Penalties are for high-sticking, slashing and hitting someone with the puck.

We were using a real puck.

Robert: Dennis - for high-sticking.

A penalty shot is taken for any infraction. A face-off is taken after each goal and after a penalty shot.

Robert: This is the way Mr. White does it.
(F.N.E.: March 18, 1982)

The hockey resembled a recognized sport more than any other activity observed. The playing area was restricted to a sheet of ice where children used sticks and a puck. The puck was soft rubber, as the children did not wear any protective equipment, and was later changed to the regulation

type puck used in professional ice hockey. Skates were not worn nor were regulation goals employed. The children not only improvised on the goals and puck used but also made use of snow to designate a center line. Teams, which were formed through negotiation, were set and seen as fair at the outset and were not altered for the remainder of the playing period. The object of the game was, like the sport of ice hockey, to shoot the puck into the opposition goal. Rules were adjusted to suit the children's concerns (a penalty for hitting another player with the puck) and were adopted from the sport and methods Mr. White used when he organized floor hockey in gym class. A winner was declared on only one occasion while the researcher participated. This was when Doug made his pronouncement.

Although the hockey activity resembled the "real game", an effort was made to include a girl; to pick fair teams; adopt rules to promote safety; to improvise on equipment; to see that the ice was not too slippery, since the children wore their winter boots.

The children spent a greater amount of time and effort playing their hockey. They made a special effort to come back to school early to play at noon hour. They brought equipment from home, set up goals, picked teams and begged the janitor for the use of a snow shovel to clean the ice.

Game of Mr. Wolf

On the way out to recess, the researcher received another invitation to play.

Laura: Dennis, do you want to play with me?

Researcher: Yes.

We went outside to the east wall of the gym. Laura and I were playing with some grade three girls. We were all leaning against the wall with a grade three girl (who was Mr. Wolf) standing away from the wall facing us.

Mr. Wolf: Knock, knock?

The rest: Who's there?

Mr. Wolf: Mr. Wolf.

The rest: What do you want?

Mr. Wolf: Colored eggs.

The rest: What color?

Mr. Wolf: Red.

If one of the people against the wall was thinking of that color, she would run out and around the wolf. If she was caught by the wolf then she became Mr. Wolf. If Mr. Wolf could not guess one of the colors in the minds of the children against the wall, she would get hints.

Laura: I'll tell you what my color starts with.

Laura speaks to me. (We were both against the wall.)

Laura: Tell me your color.

Researcher: Why?

Laura: So then we won't both run at the same time.
(F.N.E.: March 23, 1982)

A wall was a convenient boundary for Mr. Wolf. It limited the direction choice the child must make in order to run. A verse was used to initiate activity where grade three girls participated with a grade four girl. The children helped Mr. Wolf guess their color to insure they would be involved in the action and also collaborated to insure the wolf would chase only them. The children intended on taking part and used this collaborative strategy often. Being involved in the chase and becoming Mr. Wolf were important.

Game of Skipping

When the weather warmed up and the snow began to disappear, the

children spent more of their noonhours and recesses outside rather than in the shelter room.

> The grade four girls are skipping. Kathy and Mary are holding either end of a long, doubled skipping rope. Sheila, Kim and Beverly are waiting in line for their turn to try.
>
> Sheila: Go slower.
>
> Kathy and Mary comply and decrease the speed of the turning rope. Sheila is hit by and stops the rope on her first try and makes a request.
>
> Sheila: Can I try again?
>
> Kim: Okay.
>
> It is really Kim's turn but she lets Sheila try again. Beverly explained skipping to me.
>
> Beverly: All you really have to do is jump rope.
>
> Researcher: When do you stop?
>
> Beverly: When you step on it.
> (F.N.E.: April 20, 1982)
>
> The researcher became a skipper on the next occasion.
>
> I was skipping with Beverly, Sheila, Donna, Kim and Kathy. One end of the rope was tied to a stair railing so, in Beverly's words, "You need only one person to hold the rope." Turns were taken and a place in line for skipping was determined verbally.
>
> Kim: First.
>
> Donna: Second.
>
> Sheila: Third.
>
> Researcher: Fourth.
>
> Beverly was holding the rope. A chant was sung by everyone. The song was repeated as long as the skipper was successful. If the skipper stopped the rope, another song was started and a third song was started when the skipper missed during the second song. If she stopped the rope on the third song she was out and had to turn the rope. The former turner became a skipper and went to the end of the line.
>
> Researcher: What happens if a skipper is successful on all three songs?
>
> Beverly: She still has to take her turn holding.

> If a skipper is successful on all three songs, the songs are repeated until the skipper goes out. The rope is twirled faster and faster until the skipper stops the rope.
> (F.N.E.: April 21, 1982)

The playing area was often close to the school where a stair railing could be utilized, allowing more children to skip because only one turner was needed. Skipping was an individual activity where each participant attempted to be the skipper as long as possible. When a skipper performed poorly she was often given a second or third chance made possible by permission from another player or because of the rules used. If she remained as skipper for too long, however, the rope was speeded up and she was eliminated. The children were sensitive to each other's concerns but they also had a strong urge to get involved and be a skipper too.

Summary

CHILDREN'S PEER GROUP COMPETITION OUTSIDE OF A TEACHER'S CURRICULUM

Game of Raiders

Game of Push

Game of Push-Off-the Hill

Game of Push-Off-the Mountain

Game of Tag

Game of Hockey

Game of Mr. Wolf

Game of Skipping

The competitive intentions were strictly those of the children. They initiated and carried out their free play games on their own terms. Any equipment used, the playing area, any scoring required and most other rules were the choice of the children involved. Only the amount of time allowed

to take part in the activities was controlled outside of their activity. When the bell rang to summon the children into their classroom, the game ended.

The intentions of the children were a result of a need to be involved and to have action. The competitive intent of being involved was their "winning" and was often accomplished with the aid of their playmates.

Only in hockey did the children form distinct teams and use scoring to declare a wimer.

# CHAPTER VI

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In an attempt to uncover the meaning that competition had for the teachers and children within an elementary school class, this researcher focused on the competitive intent of those involved. What did the teachers and children have in mind when they competed?

The ethnographic method of doing fieldwork was employed to take into account all of the forces acting in the setting in order to gain insight into the competitive intentions. Observation, participant observation and informant interviews were the primary tools used to gain the participants' point of view as to what their intentions were. Through these devices any relationship between the intentions of the teachers and the intentions of the children in competitive situations was explored.

It was found that competition, as viewed by the participants, could not simply be defined by its root meaning or by the definition used by Margaret Mead in her study of culture. To the grade four children and their teachers, competition was often more than respectively, "an agreeable striving together" or an "endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time".

The categories of competitive interaction that emerged and the description of these categories provided an exploratory examination of the roles and subsequent intentions of the teacher and child in competitive situations. The findings must be and were considered on the basis of data that reflected the point of view of the teachers and children involved.

The field work process revealed three categories of competition.

These were:

I. teacher as a competitor with children,

II. children's peer group competition within the teacher's curriculum, and

III. children's peer group competition outside the teacher's curriculum.

I. The Teacher as a Competitor With Children

| The Teacher's Perspective | The Children's Perspective |
|---|---|
| A. Teachers' Impose Their Will | A. Children Impose Their Will |
| B. Reasons Teachers Impose Their Will | B. Reasons Children Impose Their Will |
| C. Teachers Soften Their Demands | C. The Children Complied With the Teachers' Demands |

Findings

The teacher's intention here was to carry out the curriculum using her methods. The children did not always agree or comply with the teacher's intention. The children had intentions of their own. Both parties intended to use time in their own way and in this fashion became competitors. The teacher had the power to influence or to issue commands as to what the children did in class. The children reacted competitively to her suggestions, particularly to the demands on their time. Various strategies were used by the children and teachers to get their own way. These are described in Chapter III.

Both children and teachers were capable of moderating their particular positions, although original intention remained. That is, the teacher sometimes treated students individually when making demands while children tended to differentiate their reactions to these demands on the basis of what the demand was. In the vast majority of instances, the

children submitted to demands but submission was difficult for the teacher to obtain from some children.

## Conclusion

The teachers and children saw this form of competitive interaction as one that involved a need to satisfy their respective intentions for the use of time. These intentions were present when the teacher decided what the children would do and how they would do it within the confines of the classroom and the gymnasium. The children had intentions of their own. Competition of a conflictive nature was the result when the intentions of the teacher and those of the children did not coincide.

Is this form of competition necessary for learning? If not, how can it be avoided and by what shared strategies can this conflict be resolved?

## Implications

1. Should more time be spent doing effective research to make educators aware of the different intentions of children?
2. Should more time be spent on dialogue between teachers, students and their parents in order to discover these different intentions?

When contemplating this form of competition educators and those being educated must question how well teachers, children and parents communicate. The hidden intentions of teachers for teaching, children for being in schools and parents for wanting their children to be educated must be uncovered and discussed at length.

## II. Children's Peer Group Competition Within the Teachers' Curriculum

### The Teacher Planned Competition Within Her Curriculum and Compared Pupil Performance

#### A. Reasons for the Teacher Planned Competitive Interaction and Compared Performance

### The Teacher "Set the Scene" for Competitive Interaction in Which Children Initiated Competition

#### A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Teacher Concern About the Effect of Competition on Children

C. Children's Intentions

Teacher Planned Competition Without Overt Effort to Compare Performance

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

The Teacher Facilitated the Children's Comparison of Performance

Indirect Factors That Facilitated the Comparison of Performance

A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

Children's Competitive Intentions Varied

Teacher's Awareness of Competitive Interaction

A. Academic Accomplishments

B. Accomplishments Peripheral to the Curriculum

Findings

The children involved themselves in competitive situations that were initiated or facilitated by the teacher. This peer group competition took place within the teacher's curriculum and comparison of any performance as a result of this competitive interaction was either drawn by the teacher or the competing children. The children competed in situations that the teacher intended to be competitive. The children also competed in situations they initiated and the teacher facilitated.

The children's competitive intentions were directed towards being first, to be the best, to be involved or not to take part at all. The teacher had intentions of her own for initiating competitive situations and comparing the performance of children.

Whether the competitive event was academically oriented or not, the teacher was aware of the competitive effect and took steps to alleviate it.

Competitive interaction in this sense became much more than striving to gain what another strives to gain at the same time. The competitive intentions initiated or facilitated by the teacher within his curriculum did color events. The teacher contributed subtly at times and at other times more significantly to the meaning the children gave to their competition.

The children were quite knowledgeable as to their standing within the classroom. Angie, in a final interview, outlined categories of children in her class and informed the researcher as to which category each child belonged.

a) good kids - best ones, good at work, good marks, finish first, get their work right, do what teacher tells them to do.

b) aren't good - don't get work done, don't bring back homework, bad, don't do what teacher tells them, go to special care (go out of room for help), not fast workers, a lot of homework.

c) middle, ordinary - always bring things when needed, get into the same amount of trouble, don't follow instructions.

d) good in some classes - good in math, language arts and science, not good in something like gym.

e) okay - average, some fooling around, do work well but don't really follow instructions.

f) foolish - fool around a lot in class.

(I.I.: April 27, 1982)

## Conclusion

The teachers and children saw this form of competition as one where the children's performance was compared. This was particularly apparent in academic endeavors. The result of competitive efforts in these cases was facilitated by the teacher in a very direct manner. In endeavors that were not of an academic nature, the children were mainly responsible for comparing performance.

Competition among children is made easier when the intention of the teacher and other school authorities is to pick the best or monitor the achievement of children through the use of graded report cards, marks on tests and worksheets. When the performance of children is indicated, children see themselves in a certain way.

Competition of this sort was related to the imposition of a curriculum. The teachers and the children both structured and facilitated competition because of the educational activities that were carried out.

Implications

1. Should evaluative comments on children's learning be made on an individual basis rather than on the basis of class standing?
2. Should the use of anecdotal reports and interviews be more widely used to explain the growth of children's learning rather than letter grades or percentages?
3. Should educators receive instruction on the effect that certain teaching practices have on how children see themselves?

Children must be given a variety of individual experiences in which to reach any potential they have. Any evaluation of these experiences must be made in the light of individual differences and be made specific to the child. Letter grades and percentages are efficient in order to make comparisons but are deficient in their attempt to describe the learning growth of a child.

III. Children's Peer Group Competition Outside of the Teachers' Curriculum

Game of Raiders

Game of Push

Game of Push-Off-the Hill

Game of Push-Off-the Mountain

Game of Tag

Game of Hockey

Game of Mr. Wolf

Game of Skipping

Findings

When the children's competitive interaction outside of the teacher's curriculum was considered the children's intentions were examined and interpreted in light of a reasonable amount of reticence on the part of the classroom teacher. At least in comparison to inside the classroom, the degree of teacher influence was negligible out on the school playground during recesses and noon hours when the children gathered for play.

During these times, the children were concerned with satisfying their own intentions which were a need to consider others and a desire to be part of the action. A child was not pushed off the hill while he was cleaning snow out of his boots but the skipping rope was speeded up to ensure that everyone got a turn. Even in their hockey-like game, which most resembled one structured by the teacher, everyone was allowed to play and teams were seen as fair before play began.

In the vast majority of these game-like situations, in contrast to teacher-initiated and facilitated competitive interaction, performance was not compared in any significant way. Even when teams were chosen (as in hockey) there was not a pronounced concern over who won or lost. Furthermore, the flexibility allowed on the playground made a comparison of performance difficult. The curriculum within the classroom did not allow for this flexibility. Angie shed light on this issue.

Researcher: What about out at recess? Are there any kids that are pretty good out at recess?

Angie: They're all the same out at recess.

Researcher: They're all the same out at recess?

Angie: Yeah.

Researcher: Why do you say they're all the same?

Angie: Because everybody's got a different way out at recess. So everybody's got different things to do and you can't even tell who's doing what.

Researcher: Everyone has a different way of doing things?

Angie: Yeah.

Researcher: But when they're inside school, they have to do - what do they have to do?

Angie: All the same things.
(I.I.: April 27, 1982)

This flexibility seemed to be the crucial difference between competition inside the curriculum and competition outside of it.

Conclusion

The children saw this form of competition as a co-operative activity. To be involved, "to get action", the children needed others and their good will. The experiences had to be flexible enough to accommodate the players and their intentions. If an experience was not satisfying their needs, then the children could participate in another activity on the playground.

Implications

1. Should the competitive activity on the playground be considered a learning experience for the children?
2. Should some of the characteristics of the playground activities of children be incorporated into the teacher's curriculum?

<u>The Making of Choices</u>

The character of competitive activity seems to center around the making of choices. As children interact competitively with each other

and their teachers during a school day, decisions are constantly being made as to the form this competitive activity will take. The children and teachers make choices, whether they are conscious or unconscious ones, that determine the nature of this activity. They determine not only the character of competitive activity but also whether their interaction will be competitive or not.

Research into this competitive interaction makes conscious the reality of this competition. It sheds light on why teachers and children choose to compete, the nature of their competition and possibly some of its consequences. In this way, the people involved become more cognizant of the choices they've made, examine them more critically and in some cases seek alternatives.

The choices made in the past come into question:

a) Should any aspect of a child's schooling be competitive?

b) Is competing for time between teachers and children constructive or destructive?

c) Should teachers and children be given more of a choice as to what is taught and how it is presented?

d) Should teachers initiate competition within the curriculum?

e) Is children's competition within the curriculum desirable?

f) When children choose to compete away from adult influence, are they partaking in a valuable experience?

## Considerations for Future Research

As the nature of competition within the school environment became more understood by the researcher, questions were raised regarding the importance of the influences from outside of the school. Do the pressures brought to bear by parents and other societal representatives have a

significant effect on the competitive character within the school? If so, what is the nature of this effect? In order to truly evaluate the school's role in the competitive life of children, these questions must be answered.

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# APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL PERMISSION TO OBSERVE

Feb. 17/82

Dear Parent:

I am a University of Alberta graduate student presently gathering research data for my master's degree. I have gained permission from the Edmonton Public School Board's central office and the support of Mr. White and Mrs. Smith to carry out this research in Suburban Elementary School with the grade four's.

My study will involve observing children interacting with each other and their teachers. I will note what they do and say. My observations will be unobtrusive and I will endeavor not to disrupt normal classroom routine and learning. In compiling my research findings, strict confidentiality will be adhered to.

If you have any concerns please call me at:

432-5090 (office)

434-6907 (home)

Yours truly,

Dennis Perrier

## APPENDIX B

## LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW

Suburban Elementary School
Feb. 22/82

Dear Parent:

As you already know I am carrying out a research project with Mrs. Smith's grade four class. As part of this research I may find it necessary to question your child. These questions will be asked in order to find out the child's perspective of events and situations that happen in school.

All responses will be kept confidential.

If you agree with my questioning of your child check "yes". If not, check "no".

yes _____ child's name _____

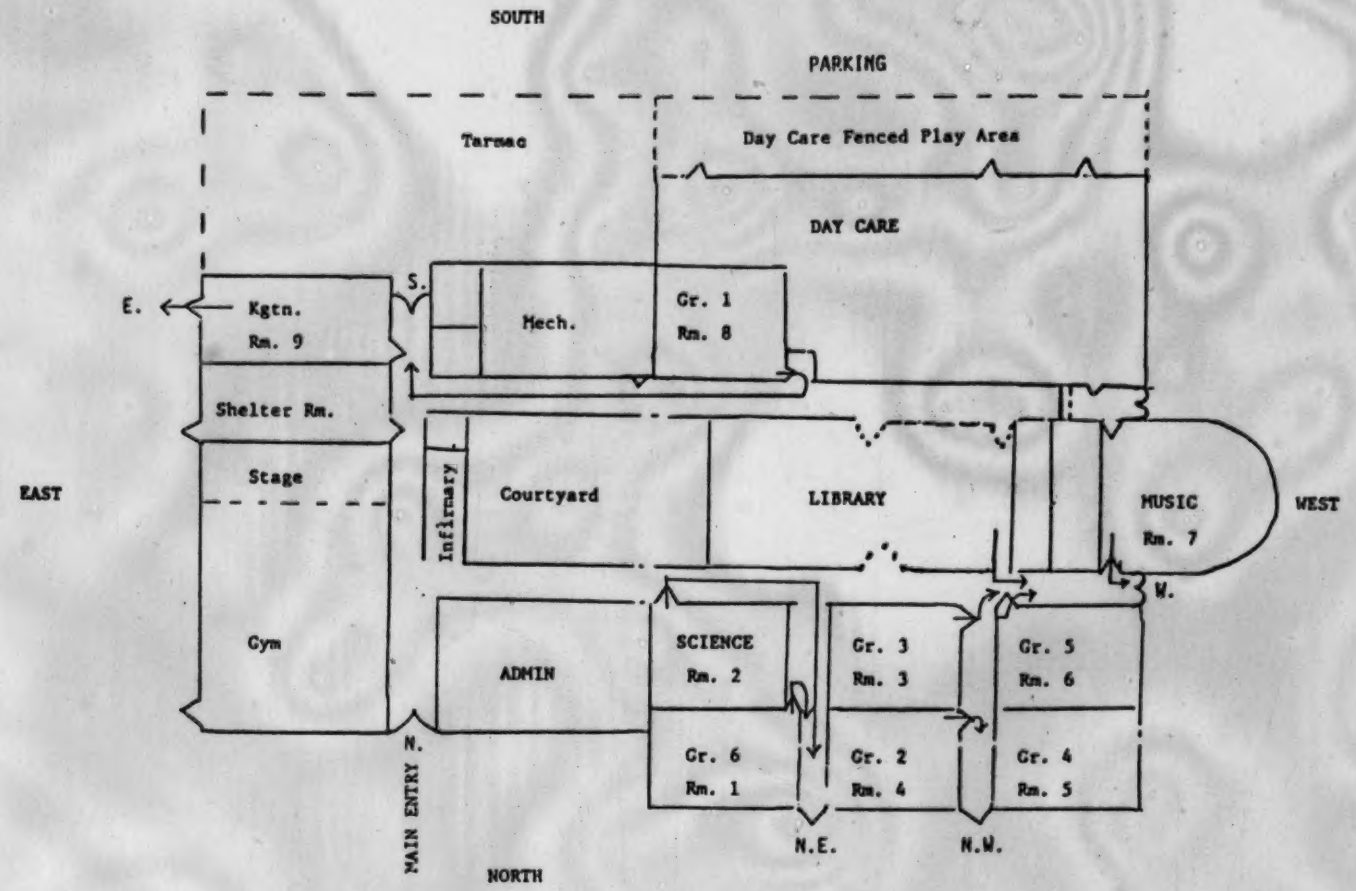
no _____ parent's signature _____

Yours truly,

Dennis Perrier,
Graduate Student
University of Alberta

APPENDIX C

DIAGRAM OF THE SCHOOL LAY-OUT



# APPENDIX D

## CLASS TIMETABLE

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9:00- 9:15 | U.S.S.R. (Rm. 5) | → | → | → | → |
| 9:15-10:30 | L.A. (Rm. 5) | → | → | 10:00 Health (Rm. 5) → | L.A. |
| 10:30-10:45 | Recess (outside) | → | → | → | → |
| 10:45-11:15 | Spelling (Rm. 5) | book exchange (library) | Spelling | French (Rm. 5) | Social (Rm. 5) |
| 11:15-11:45 | French | P.E. (gym) | French | P.E. | Social |
| 11:45-12:00 | L.A. | → | → | → | → |
| 12:00- 1:15 | Lunch | → | → | → | → |
| 1:15- 1:45 | Math (Rm. 5) | → | → | → | → |
| 1:45- 2:15 | Science (Rm. 2) | Math | Science | Math | Science |
| 2:15- 2:30 | Recess | → | → | → | → |
| 2:30- 3:00 | Social | French | Art (Rm. 5) | Social | Music (Rm. 1) |
| 3:10- 3:30 | Social | Music | Art | Art | French |

P.E. → Mr. White
Math, Science → Mr. Green
all other subjects → Mrs. Smith

APPENDIX E

SCHOOL OPENING LETTER

SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

September 8, 1981

Dear Parents:

The teachers and students approach the beginning of this new school year with joy and anticipation for a successful year. We know that with your continued interest and support, our hopes will be realized.

You will have the opportunity to visit the school for various functions which are planned. But, please do not restrict your visits only to those occasions. We hope you will feel free to make an appointment or just stop by at any time.

The school has had a major uplifting during the summer and as a result, bears a new face. As with all surgery, there is a period of recovery and we will be experiencing it for the next while. However, the end result will be one that we all can be proud of.

I am looking forward to meeting you all as the year unfolds and I know we will be working together so that our children receive the best education that we can provide.

Educationally yours,

J.E. White

J.E. White
Principal

SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

September 8, 1981

NEWSLETTER

1. OPEN HOUSE

We are planning an Open House on Tuesday, September 22, 1981. The timetable will be:

7:00 - 7:30 - Grades I, II and III teachers meeting with parents in their respective classrooms.

7:30 - 8:00 - Grades IV, V and VI teachers meeting with parents in their respective classrooms.

8:00 - 9:00 - Informal gathering in gymnasium for bake sale, coffee and visiting.

The teachers will have the curriculum materials they plan on using on display and will be giving an overview of their courses for the year.

We are looking forward to meeting with you then and working with you during the coming year.

2. LUNCH PROGRAM

a) At the present time, there is no lunch program at Suburban School. All parents are expected to make their own arrangements regarding lunch facilities for their children.

However, the school will provide space for the students to eat lunch, if the parents would be willing to hire an aide to supervise the children or were willing to set up a parent supervision schedule.

If any parents would be interested in such a program, would they please let me know. I will then arrange a time for all those parents to meet to organize and set up the program.

b) Any persons willing to provide space in their homes for students to eat or are willing to supervise students at school, please phone the school and let us know.

3. EDMONTON LOCAL BOARD OF HEALTH

Information letter attached.

DIRT ON COPY
PAGE TACHEE



**Edmonton Local Board of Health**
COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE EDMONTON HEALTH DISTRICT

7th Floor, CN Tower,
10004 - 104 Avenue,
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 0K1

TO ALL PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Now that another school year has started, you may be interested in the school health services that are provided to students through the district public health nurse from the Edmonton Local Board of Health.

As well as being available to students in any grade and to aid in providing health education, several specific health services are offered. Among them are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | - vision, hearing, speech screening<br>- (immunization should be complete upon entry into kindergarten - after age 4) |
| Grade 1 | - T.B. skin test |
| Grade 2,4 | - vision screening |
| Grade 6 | - rubella (german measles) immunization for girls |
| Grade 7 | - health interview, vision screening<br>- colour vision screening for boys only<br>- girls screened for scoliosis (abnormal curvature of the spine) |
| Grade 9 | - T.B. skin test<br>- booster immunization for diphtheria, tetanus and polio<br>As this is the final booster offered in school, students are encouraged to keep their record card for future reference. |
| Please note: | For all immunization procedures "permission to immunize" cards will be sent home ahead of time for your signature. |

As the public health nurse for this school I will contact you if any concerns arise. However, if you require any more information or have concern about any of the above, please contact me through the school or at the nearest public health clinic.

Thank you.

Public Health Nurse

Clinic

10/80

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. SUBURBAN BROWNIES, GUIDES AND PATHFINDERS

Registration for the Suburban Brownies, Guides and Pathfinders will take place on September 15 at 7:00 P.M. in the Gym of the Suburban Elementary School.

The Guides are in desperate need of an adult leader in order to start their program this fall. No experience is necessary and training will be provided.

Fur further information call (District Commissioner), 434- .

2. REGISTRATION FOR SUBURBAN CUBS, SCOUTS, VENTURERS

Registration will take place on Monday evening, September 14, at 8:00 P.M. sharp, in the Shelter Room of the Suburban School. Boys and parents should come to this meeting to learn about the programs, meet leaders and arrange for the participation of parents in conducting programs.

3. GROUP PIANO LESSONS

Group piano lessons, authorized by the Edmonton Public School Board, will be offered again this year. Students grade 2 to 6 are eligible for enrolment.

Registration forms are available at the school office or phone Mrs. at 434- .

4. TAP, JAZZ AND BALLET DANCING

Our former instructor is not available to teach dancing in Suburban Community this year so we hope to become part of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues Dance Program. This city-wide program starts this fall and aims to standardize and upgrade the level of dancing taught in communities. Presently the closest class available is at School but if enough interest is shown in the Suburban area, classes may be offered at Suburban School. Registration is September 9, 1981, between 6:30 and 7:30 at School (if you prefer classes at Suburban School, please indicate same on your registration form). The fee is $40.00 for 15 weeks instruction.

5. SATURDAY MORNING GYM

Edmonton Parks and Recreation is offering an activity program in Suburban School Gym for ten Saturday mornings commencing September 26, 1981. The program is open to all children living in or near the area and there is no fee.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Preschool gym | (2 and 3 years<br>( | 9 - 10 -- This group must be accompanied by an adult |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | (4 and 5 years | 10 - 11 |
| Sports and games | 6 - 9 years | 11 - 12 |

Children should come prepared in runners and play clothes and there is no advance registration. For more information call at 434- .

6. SQUARE DANCE CLUB

Community League is forming a Square Dance Club for children in grades four through nine. If you are interested in learning to Square Dance or already know how, you may be interested in joining this club. The club would operate on Thursdays from about 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. and the cost would be about $1.00 each time. If this is of interest to you, show up at hall on Thursday, October 1, 1981, by 6:30 P.M. For more information call at 434- .